University of Alberta

Mobilization and Dissent: the SPD, the Left Opposition, and the Social Democratic Rank and File, 1929-1931

by

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Abstract

This study analyses specific aspects of the quick fragmentation of the German Social Democratic Party (SPD) during the last years of the Weimar Republic. A prime focus of the study is the gradual alienation of the Social Democratic Left Opposition and its eventual split from the SPD, and the formation of the Social Democratic Workers' Party (SAP) in 1931. A secondary focus is on the SPD's difficulties to mobilize politically four important groups in its constituency—youth, women, intellectuals and civil servants, and agricultural workers—as evidenced by the debates in the Social Democratic periodical *Das Freie Wort* regarding the role of these groups in the party. The thesis attempts to establish a connection between these two developments and present them as evidence that the SPD was becoming politically isolated and too weak to defend the democratic republic against the concerted Nazi and conservative attack.

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List of Abbreviations

ADGB	Allgemeiner Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (Social Democratic Workers' Trade Union)
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei (German Democratic Party)
DNVP	Deutschnationale Volkspartei (German National People's Party)
DVP	Deutsche Volkspartei (German People's Party)
KK-G	Klassenkampf-Group
KPD	Kommunistische Partei Deutschlands (German Communist Party)
KPO	Kommunistische Partei-Opposition (Communist Party-Opposition)
NSDAP	Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei (National Socialist German Workers' Party)
SA	Sturmabteilung (Stormtroops)
SAJ	Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend (Social Democratic Youth Organization)
SAP	Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Workers' Party)
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party)

Introduction

No other political party is more closely associated with the history of the Weimar Republic then the German Social Democratic Party (SPD). The rise and fall of the first German republic runs parallel to the SPD's ascent to political pre-eminence in 1918 and its eventual (if temporary) demise in 1933. The early history of the SPD during Weimar is a chronicle of many successes on behalf of the labour movement, but its conclusion reads like an account of failure and missed opportunities to seize and use political power against the anti-republican forces and the storming Nazi mob. The once dominant party faltered at the moment of Germany's worst crisis and became " a simple object, not the shaping subject of events, and thereby lost its leading role" in the fateful decades of the 1930s and 1940s.[1]

Scholars examining the reasons for the failure of the SPD and the Weimar Republic, initially divided into two schools of thought. Those who maintain that exogenous factors played a crucial role in the demise of the democratic political system

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[1] W. Abendroth, *Aufstieg und Krise der Sozialdemokratie* (Frankfurt/Main: Stimme, 1964), 7

of Weimar and of the SPD, conclude that there was nothing the party could have done to change the historical conditions that assured the ascent of Hitler's National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP). First laconically expressed in Otto Braun's famous phrase "*Versailles und Moskau*"[2], this position maintains that the heavy burden of the Versailles Treaty, the catastrophic effects of the world economic crisis and the communist opposition to the SPD announced in the Comintern, severely limited SPD's room for manoeuvre and isolated it.[3]

By contrast, those scholars who support the theory that endogenous causes brought about the SPD's downfall claim that the organisation could and should have taken measures to correct its internal flaws, reform its outdated political thinking and modernize its political practice. Proponents of this view, however, do not always agree on the radix of SPD immobility. Some point to its structure, others to its ideology, while a third category favour an explanation blending those factors.

An early observer, Robert Michels, for instance, attempted to show that structural and ideological transformations leading inevitably to reformism and conservatism were objective processes common to all political parties.[4] Any party will become more conservative and less democratic, he wrote, in a parliamentary system that emphasizes maintaining power and winning more votes from social groups other than its traditional voting constituency. This leads to both a structural as well as an ideological

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[2] O. Braun, *Von Weimar zu Hitler* (Hamburg: Hammonia, 1949), 5

[3] Important works discussing Weimar from this perspective are: L. Zimmermann, *Deutsche Außenpolitik in der Aera der Weimarer Republik* (Goettingen: Musterschmidt, 1958); P. Krüger, *Die Außenpolitik der Republik von Weimar* (Darmstadt: Dtv, 1985); H. Weber, *Die Wandlung des deutschen Kommunismus* (Frankfurt: EVA, 1969); H. Weber, *Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1982)

[4] R. Michels. *Political Parties* (New York: Dover, 1959)

transformation. Obtaining any measure of political power also determines a change in the relationship between the state and any party no matter how revolutionary the party in question; once it was able to acquire political power, the party would perceive as self-defeating any efforts to undermine the state system.[5] For Michels this was clear proof that the organization had become the purpose in and of itself rather than a means to a purpose: revolutionary socialism. Even prior to the beginning of the Great War, he maintained, German Social Democracy had tacitly expressed its support for the state (while officially opposing colonialism), particularly as a guarantor of the new-found prosperity for the German worker in the age of imperialism and competition for the world markets upon which that prosperity was so heavily dependant.[6]

Siegmund Neumann, a contemporary SPD sympathizer, commented as well on the structural and ideological changes German Social Democracy had experienced after World War I.[7] He showed that the SPD had a Marxist program but practised politics imbued by a liberal *Weltanschauung*. This was made perfectly clear in November 1918, when despite the pressure exerted by the Independent Socialists (USPD), the SPD opted for parliamentary democracy rather than the proletarian (or council) democracy. There is no room here to discuss the practical reasons why its choice made good sense, but the fact that the SPD did not even consider implementing the dictatorship of the proletariat spoke volumes. As for its militancy, the SPD's record during Weimar revealed the central preoccupation of its policy: defence and stabilization of the parliamentary republic.[8] This

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[5] Michels, 365-368
[6] H. Grebing, *Geschichte der Deutschen Parteien* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1962), 138-139
[7] S. Neumann, *Die Parteien der Weimarer Republik* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1965)
[8] Neumann, 30

implied a sense of responsibility towards the state which excluded revolutionary thinking and promoted a reformist one. This turnaround, according to Neumann, reflected significant changes in the social structure of the SPD. Particularly after WW I, the demographics of the Social Democrat milieu had changed. By 1930, only sixty per cent of the SPD was composed of workers, and in the national elections of that year, as much as forty percent of SPD's ballots came from bourgeois voters. At the same time, labour laws, Weimar's social policies and improved earnings in the last half century, on one hand, and the strong influx into the party of low-level civil servants, functionaries and skilled workers, on the other, had transformed the organization into the party of those "who had more to lose than just their chains", as one SPD leader had observed.[9] All these factors led to a policy of prudence, conservatism and compromise. While this course made sense in terms of *Realpolitik*, it did not go well with youth; the SPD was by 1932 an organization of the middle-aged and the elderly.

In conclusion, Neumann summarized the problems of the party as originating in the phenomena of bourgeoisification, bossification and geriatrization (*Verbürgerlichung, Verbonzung, Unjugendlichkeit*).[10] The party had transformed too far into a bureaucratic organization directed solely by rational principles—to the exclusion of emotional issues so important in politics—under the guidance of functionary-type leaders lacking in charisma but quick with the sober argument when incendiary rhetoric was winning the day. The coalition policy of the SPD and, after the elections of September 1930, its toleration of the Brüning regime had alienated many of its supporters, some of whom

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[9] ibid., 33
[10] ibid., 32

crossed over to the KPD or even the NSDAP. Another consequence of these policies was the radicalization of the left wing of the party, which led to a split in September 1931 and the formation of the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAP).[11] Neumann correctly saw that the ever-increasing distance between the reformists and the radicals inside Social Democracy would hamper significantly or even make impossible the creation of a proletarian united front against the extraordinary rise of the Nazi party . Only three years later, Arthur Rosenberg had to admit ruefully that the Nazi takeover, even survival in the turbulent 1931-1932 period, were possible because of SPD's inability to seize political initiative and unite the working class at a moment when the labouring masses were desperately looking for leadership and action as means of escape from the crippling economic crisis. But the SPD could not respond to the challenges of a very difficult time; having identified itself with the legal and democratic republic from its inception, the party could not see itself as a revolutionary organization anymore, precisely when the situation called for one. So it is that the SPD crumbled while the NSDAP thrived in the extreme conditions of 1933.[12]

Immediately after 1945 historians were compelled to understand the nature of Nazism and its relationship with the German people and to try to fit the irrational in the continuum of German history in a rational way. Soon, however, the old themes took their rightful place as material of debate in the quest to understand the origins of the catastrophe. The sizable responsibility of the SPD for the collapse of Weimar democracy was prominent among these themes. Karl Dietrich Bracher wrote the first and, to date, the

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[11] Neumann, 38-39

[12] A. Rosenberg, *A History of the German Republic* (London: Methuen, 1936), 288-319

most comprehensive history of the dissolution of the German first republic.[13] In his analysis the SPD bears a heavy responsibility for facilitating the Nazi success through its passivity and lack of leadership. At a juncture when the NSDAP was riven with internal battles and declining support, the SPD laid bare its weakness by accepting the July 1932 illegal Papen coup in Prussia (*Reichsexekution*), which sapped the morale of its supporters and fortified that of the Nazis. This decision damaged the party's political credibility and smoothed the path for the Nazi takeover only months later.[14] Many in the SPD were even countenancing allowing the NSDAP to take power without much opposition in the firm belief that it would soon crash against the intractable problems of the time, after which the voters would again turn towards the Social Democrats for leadership. Such attitudes bespoke the SPD's underestimation of the Nazis' political acumen and their determination to destroy parliamentary democracy. Bracher ascribes the Socialists' political blindness and tactical rigidity to its executive's old and inflexible ideas and concepts, which were inappropriate to the changing dynamics in the German political arena. Bracher points out that even after the Nazi takeover, SPD leaders like Otto Braun or Carl Severing maintained that there was nothing they could have done differently.[15]

Similarly, Erich Matthias identified the failure of the SPD to effectively oppose Hitler's ascent as one of the major factors for contributing to the weakness of German democracy. He attributed this impotence to its "rigid self-consciousness" rooted in pre-World War One experience and ideas which paralysed its actions considerably more than

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[13] K.D. Bracher, *Die Auflösung der Weimarer Republik* (Villingen/Schwarzwald: Ring Verlag, 1955)
[14] Bracher, 599-600
[15] ibid., 699-700

the "much-invoked unfavourable 'conditions'."[16] Matthias emphasized the "traditional patterns of behaviour"[17] that prevented the SPD from understanding and effectively using the political power at its disposal both to entrench democracy in Weimar and to stunt the Nazi movement. Fatal among these "patterns of behaviour" were an oppositionist mentality rather than a positive, voluntaristic one, a "lack of constructive initiative and tactical elasticity"[18], and a stubborn legalistic approach in situations in which its opponents snubbed the law with impunity. Matthias also points out that the accomodationist conduct of the Social Democratic German League of Trade Unions (ADGB) towards the Nazis, its total refusal to consider a general strike after the *Reichsexekution* in Prussia and its subservient behaviour to Hitler, particularly between January and May 1, 1933, indicates that the ADGB was guided more by "national-liberal" principles than socialist ones and more concerned with organizatorical survival than serving the workers.[19] That in time of difficulty the ADGB would so quickly divorce itself from its twin, the SPD, as it did in 1933, bespoke the grave crisis inside German Social Democracy.

Helga Grebing also noted the imperfect cooperation between the two great social democratic organisations: the SPD and the ADGB. The socialist trade unions, she wrote, were not particularly dedicated to the establishment of a democratic republic in 1919 as their goal was to conserve the conditions under which they had achieved great success.

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[16] E. Matthias, "Der Untergang der alten Sozialdemokratie 1933" in *Vierteljahrhefte für Zeitgeschichte*, 4 (1956), pp. 250-286, reproduced in *Von Weimar zu Hitler 1930-1933*, ed. G. Jasper (Köln: Kieppenheuer, 1968), 281— "German Social Democracy in the Weimar Republic" in *German Democracy and the Triumph of Hitler*, eds. A. Nichols and E. Matthias (London: George Allen, 1971), 53

[17] Matthias, 1971, 56

[18] ibid., also Matthias and R. Morsey, *Das Ende der Parteien* (Düsseldorf: Droste,1960), 101-102

[19] Matthias 1968, 198-301

They believed they could function under any regime as long as they stayed away from radical policies. Once the SPD took charge in the new political order, the trade unions supported the new regime and fought its enemies, including its own Left wing.[20] But, like the leaders of the SPD, the ADGB brass lacked a "clear conception of what social democracy should be."[21] Despite the clear political advantage German Social Democracy gained by successfully rebuffing the reactionary forces behind the Kapp putsch in 1920, this lack of vision prevented the socialists from effecting social, economic and political changes that would have guaranteed the long-term success of democracy in Germany. Grebing claims that both the SPD and the ADGB were suffering from similar deficiencies: bureaucratization, lack of flexibility, old ideas coming from old and entrenched cadre and an alienation of the members from the paid, full-time officials.[22] These shortcomings caused the leadership to misread the willingness of the workers to fight the surging Nazis[23] and contributed to an ideological inertia that prevented them from a correct "analysis of the forces in society." The latter, in turn, made the party unable "to reach conclusions on political action."[24] In addition, the SPD suffered from a fatal fear of violent confrontation and was reluctant to assume political power. Such fears explain the quiescent (*Stillhaltetaktik)* and legalist[25] reaction to Franz von Papen's coup in Prussia, and the resigned acceptance of the events between July 1932 and June 1933, when Hitler finally proscribed the mass-based party. Similarly, the ADGB answered

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[20] H. Grebing, *The History of the German Labour Movement* (London: Berg, 1969), 125
[21] ibid.
[22] ibid., 128
[23] Grebing, *Geschichte*, 156
[24] ibid., 132
[25] Grebing, *Geschichte*, 157

Papen's and Hitler's aggression with the watchword *Organisation, nicht Demonstration* first, later with attempts to distance itself from the SPD[26], and finally by offering to meld with Nazi trade unions. Nothing worked, as Hitler first used them briefly, and then destroyed them in May 1933.

North American study of Weimar Social Democracy prior to the 1980s has drawn similar conclusions to the ones outlined above. The most notable of these was the thorough analysis of the party by Richard N. Hunt.[27] After a detailed study, Hunt felt compelled to agree with Max Weber in his assertion that the SPD was a "state within a state", coordinated by a huge bureaucratic machine whose salaried employees grew progressively distant from the ordinary members. Consistent with Michels' typology of the mass party, Hunt found that the SPD had moved to the middle in its ideology despite its Marxist rhetoric, had stagnated after 1919, and grew gradually less democratic. Again, the party suffered from *Verbonzung, Verkalkung* (ossification), *Verbürgerlichung*, a host of ills that sapped the organisation's morale and prevented it from finding the leadership and dynamism necessary to combat the Nazi movement.[28] He also agreed that the ADGB, an enormous organisation itself (in fact, numerically much larger than the SPD), became a liability to the SPD in the bitter political battles of the early 1930s; on the one hand, ADGB's economic priorities forced a dilution of SPD's radical policies, which in turn cost the parties votes to the KPD; on the other hand, the ADGB weakened the socialist front at the end of the republic when it disavowed the SPD and sought to accommodate

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[26] Grebing, *Geschichte*, 157; also Grebing *History of German Labour*, 137
[27] Richard N. Hunt, *German Social Democracy 1918-1933.* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964)
[28] ibid., 26-62; 241-259

the Nazis.[29] Such was the general consensus on the role of the SPD in the collapse of the Weimar republic.

In the 1980s and 90s, however, a number of dissenting voices appeared in German scholarship that challenged several conclusions drawn by previous historians, particularly their verdict on SPD's understanding of National Socialism. Rainer Schaefer, for instance, dismissed the theory of SPD responsibility for the rise of Nazism.[30] While the party failed to adapt its tactics from a parliamentary to an extra-parliamentary opposition to Nazism, this was not because it misunderstood or underestimated the latter (the SPD did, however, gauge the movement's dynamism inadequately), but because of structural limits and its increased isolation in the Weimar political landscape. Schaefer contends that even an SPD-led uprising would have undoubtedly failed in front of a united front of the army, the bourgeois forces and the Nazis. Hans Mommsen, who offered a similar analysis, agreed that there were many aspects to criticize about the development of the SPD after the turn of the century, and especially after 1914, but that the party's overall contribution to democracy in Germany had been remarkable.[31] The SPD's political isolation, especially from the liberal bourgeoisie (a feature present almost from its very beginning in the mid nineteenth century), and the economic and social realities of the Weimar era, pre-determined that the organisation could not become a populist party (*Volkspartei*), and therefore could not acquire the size and power

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[29] ibid., 149-190

[30] Rainer Schaefer, *SPD in der Aera Brüning: Tolerierung oder Mobilisierung?* (Frankfurt/Main: Campus 1990)

[31] Hans Mommsen. "Die Sozialdemokratie in der Defensive: der Immobilismus der SPD in der Anstieg des Nationalsozialismus", in *Sozialdemokratie zwischen Klassenbewegung und Volkspartei*, H. Mommsen ed., (Frankfurt/M: Athenäum Verlag, 1974)

necessary to fend off an opportunistic populist movement like Nazism. To preserve democracy, the SPD needed the cooperation of the bourgeois parties, and these were determined to do away with it. Therefore, it is the bourgeois parties which are to blame for the Nazi catastrophe. Finally, Heinrich August Winkler also supports the theory that the anti-democratic political climate in Germany at the end of Weimar and the increasing fragmentation of the labour movement were developments that the SPD could not influence, in its waning political relevance, in a decisive way.[32]

From a different perspective, Reinhard Sturm charged that much previous literature had erred in claiming that the SPD lacked serious discussion and analysis of National Socialism and therefore was ill prepared to meet the latter's challenge.[33] Sturm attributed this error specifically to the so-called Marburg School, under the leadership of Wolfgang Abendroth, and to GDR historiography, which disseminated the thesis that the SPD "did not possess an analysis of fascism."[34] The falsehood of this thesis can be imputed to shoddy research, Sturm wrote, or to the scarcity of sources, a real impediment in the 1950-1970 period. I strongly agree with Sturm's view. A careful reading of articles in *Neue Blätter für den Sozialismus* between 1930 and 1933, for instance, will offer one a rich selection of insightful, thorough analyses of National Socialism and fascism from respected Social Democrats such as C. Mierendorff, A. Rathmann, E. Heimann, A. Meusel, F. Borinski, F. Geyer, Th. Haubach and others. The effect of the "Marburg thesis" was not negligible; compilations and collections of writings on fascism published

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[32] H.A. Winkler, *Der Weg in die Katastrophe* (Bonn: Dietz, 1990), 679
[33] R. Sturm, "Faschismusauffassungen der Sozialdemokratie in der Weimarer Republik", in *Solidargemeinschaft und Klassenkampf*, R. Saage, ed. (Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp, 1986)
[34] W. Abendroth, op. cit., 66

in the sixties and seventies did not include SPD authors. When it was conceded that the SPD did have a conception of fascism, it was dismissed as either wrong or very inadequate.[35] Sturm shows that leading SPD politicians and theoreticians such as Ernst Hamburger analysed correctly and thoroughly the nature and purpose of fascism from its very beginning in Italy in the early 1920s. Sturm claims that it is no longer useful or relevant to inquire into why the SPD "underestimated" or "misunderstood" German fascism and caused it to fight National Socialism so ineffectively. What needs to be revealed is what socio-historical complex of conditions prevented it from developing and implementing a successful anti-fascist strategy, *despite* the SPD's realistic theories and solid analysis of fascism.[36]

Donna Harsch, for instance, in a more recent study, offered an excellent example on how a synthetic explanation affords a more balanced view on the subject, while introducing a new revealing factor: the SPD's political culture.[37] In her opinion, it is this all-pervasive political culture that is accountable for the reluctance to revise both structure and ideology, when to do so would have given the party a fighting chance. Harsch took issue with those historians who "overemphasize" the bureaucratization and bourgeoisification of the SPD as decisive causes of its ruin, noting that "there is no a priori reason why a nonproletarian party should suffer political immobilization."[38] Harsch showed how the SPD could still mobilize tremendous energies to the defence of the Republic with the initial success, in early 1932, of the Iron Front, the organization it

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[35] Sturm, 304
[36] Sturm, 322
[37] D. Harsch, *SPD and the Rise of Nazism* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1993)
[38] ibid., 5

spearheaded in response to the Nazi aggression. However, ultimately, the legalist, non-revolutionary strains in German Social Democracy and internal dissensions stifled the fighting potential within its ranks.[39] The failure, after a promising debut, of the Iron Front is an additional indication of the growing disconnection between the SPD's leadership and the rank and file.

The political immobilization Harsch documents neutralized the pro-republican forces and allowed the rise of the Nazi party to power. The SPD's incapacity to unite all Marxist forces against the NSDAP, or attract the large mass of undecided German voters in the 1930 (or 1932) elections was blamed at the time by an increasing group of younger, more radical Social Democrats on the SPD's diffident politics, its coalition policy and its perceived concessions to conservative forces. This criticism became that much louder when the SPD executive adopted the "toleration" tactic toward the anti-democratic Brüning regime (March 1930-May 1932) as the "lesser evil" to a probable NSDAP-led government of the right wing forces. This criticism grew more strident in 1931, especially from a group of "hard" left Social Democrats known as the *Klassenkampf* group (KK-G). When two leaders of the group were thrown out of the party for refusing to shut down a newspaper in accordance with the SPD executive's orders, most members of *Klassenkampf* left the organization. In September 1931, they formed a new party: the Socialist Workers' Party of Germany (SAPD or SAP). Its members claimed that a split was inevitable, that the old party had lost its vigour, its democratic ethic and its touch with the masses. There is no doubt that many young intellectuals with radical left views

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[39] This point of view is also shared by R. Schaefer, op.cit., 438-445

in the SPD agreed with this diagnosis. But what did the rank and file think?

As a response to the increasing appeal of the NSDAP to large segments of the German society, the SPD sought to modify its organizational work and propaganda in order to integrate more special voters groups such as youth, women, white-collar workers and civil servants, and agricultural labourers and small farmers. By taking this course, the SPD was departing from its original intent of being the party of the working class and strove to become a "people's party" (*Volkspartei*). The organization was not well suited for this step, but it had little choice; its traditional base—the urban, middle-aged, skilled male industrial workers—was stagnant, if not shrinking. The SPD could not continue to be the dominant political party in Weimar and check the rise of fascism, if it fell short of convincingly representing the interests of other groups. My thesis will show that the SPD largely failed to transform itself into a people's party, despite the efforts it made over the volatile period of 1929-30. As the letters and articles I analyse clearly reveal, the party could not adopt the changes or mitigate the conflicts that were entailed by including other groups in its political base. In the process, however, as the split of the Left proves, the SPD further alienated some of its original constituency, the radical socialists. This study confirms the growing gap between the SPD's moderate leadership and the party's left wing, on one hand, and the rank and file on the other.

I chose to focus on the 1929-1930 period not only because it witnessed the vertiginous rise of the NSDAP, but also because it is a microcosm of the problems that wracked the SPD, especially those problems deepened the divide between the Left and the majority of the party. I use the issues raised by the SAP and its specific criticisms of SPD's policies and actions as a relative framework for comparing how the Left's

concerns were echoed or not among Social Democrats at large. For this purpose, the first section of the thesis will present the history of the SAP (and of its predecessor the *Klassenkampf Gruppe)*, its activities, its policies and its theory. My summary account of SAP's activities is based on the most relevant literature written on the subject and on a series of theoretical books published by its members in 1931 and 1932[40]. The second part of the thesis will analyse the thoughts and sentiments of ordinary Social Democrats regarding the party's attitudes towards youth, women, farmers and some sections of the middle-class as reflected in the letters they sent to the SPD periodical *Das Freie Wort* (DFW). This weekly was the party's sounding board with its membership and sympathisers. Opinions voiced here were often candid, unsparing .

The main purpose of this study is to ascertain if the SAP's split from the SPD was a symptomatic and necessary development conditioned by the daunting challenge of fighting off the Nazis. Another, no less important aim of my study is to explore the question about whether the cracks in the unity of the party were caused by the rift with its left wing, or if this was a symptom of a deeper organizational crisis. In the choice of sources I use, therefore, I deliberately depart from the early example set by Karl Dietrich Bracher and Erich Matthias in their analyses of the Weimar SPD, where the party's pulse and thought was reconstituted from the legacies of leaders like Otto Braun, Carl Severing, Julius Leber, Friedrich Stampfer, and others. The letters in DFW present a slightly different perspective on SPD's self-understanding from the men and women

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[40] Unfortunately, I did not have access to *Der Klassenkampf*, the theoretical organ of the KK-G and of the SAP, as North American collections of the newspaper are non-circulating. However, aware of the scarcity of sources on the SAP, Hanno Drechsler quoted numerous and large sections of *"Der Klassenkampf"* articles in his book , *Die Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands (SAPD)*, (Meisenheim am Glan: Verlag Anton Hain, 1965), a foresight that proved very valuable.

who worked in factories, homes and offices, and who waited to the last minute for the call to reclaim the German streets from the Nazi hoodlums only to see their party unequal to the challenge.

My study aims to be a contribution to this effort of re-evaluation by showing how differences and expressions of differences between the "hard" Left of the party and elements of the rank and file, on the one hand, and the moderate section of the SPD representing the views of its leadership, on the other hand, point to internal fractions that had to weaken the fighting spirit of German Social Democracy precisely when this spirit was most violently challenged.

The Left Opposition

The splitting of the SPD into a revolutionary, leftist minority, and a moderate, reformist majority gained momentum early into the first decade of the twentieth century.[41] This process accelerated during World War I, when a nucleus in the Left condemned and continuously opposed the decision of the executive to support the war effort. In 1917, the Left formed its own party, the Independent Social Democratic Party (USPD), after it was

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[41] C. Schorske, *German Social Democracy, 1905-1917: The Development of the Great Schism* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1955), is the definitive study on the subject .

expelled from the SPD for organizing a separate conference.[42] The Spartacus Group, the most radical faction within the Left, further split from the USPD to form the German Communist Party (KPD) in the last days of 1918.

In the initial stages of the November Revolution, the SPD and the USPD cooperated in the abolition of the old order. Soon, however, it became evident that the SPD executive, while committed to a parliamentary democracy, did not plan to force radical economic and social changes. Its corporatist convictions led the Majority SPD to endorse a political arrangement in which all social interests had representation in a democratic parliament within an essentially bourgeois pluralist and liberal republic, where national interests overrode political platforms.[43]

This political attitude inevitably led to serious confrontations with radical socialists, particularly the KPD. The SPD's identification with Weimar and its statist and reformist tendencies inherited from the pre-war period further widened the gulf between the former and the other two socialist parties. Resentment turned to bitter enmity when the SPD used reactionary forces to put down several Communist uprisings in the early history of Weimar. The hostility that ensued was to endure throughout Weimar and beyond.[44]

The KPD became a much more dangerous opponent to the SPD after the 1920 splitting of the USPD, when the bulk of the latter party joined the communists.

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[42] G. Eley, "The SPD in War and Revolution, 1914-1919", in *Bernstein to Brandt,* (London: Arnold, 65)
[43] ibid., 70; G. Mann, *History of Germany since 1789* (London: Chatto, 1968), 549
[44] This conflict was analysed early and often, beginning with Ossip Flechtheim's *Die KPD in der Weimarer Republik* (Frankfurt/M.: EVA, 1969), and, among others, Conan Fischer with *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism* (London: Macmillan, 1991) and Hermann Weber's, *Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie.* A more recent contribution belongs to Eric D. Weitz with *Creating German Communism, 1890-1990* (Princeton University Press, 1997)

Ineffective and without resources, the remnants of the USPD re-joined the SPD in 1922. This marked the return of a left opposition wing to the Social Democratic movement. Since the 1917 split, there had been virtually no opposition inside the SPD as evidenced by the fact that the 1921 largely revisionist Görlitzer party program had been adopted against only five votes.[45]

The Left Opposition organized around former Communist leader Paul Levi and his followers who had left the KPD because of its putschist tactics. [46] Initially a loosely constituted group, the Left Opposition became considerably more cohesive after the SPD-backed government action against the socialist government of Saxony in 1923. The SPD's perception of itself as a party of law and order, ready to use the reactionary Reichswehr to put down workers' actions or to overthrow legal socialist provincial governments was unconscionable for the members of the Left. The fundamental philosophical difference between the SPD establishment and the opposition was their attitude towards the state. In 1925, the SPD had adopted a new program at the Heidelberg party conference which connected strongly to the Erfurt Program, and was expected to give the party the ideological and practical direction necessary to avoid debacles like those in 1920 and 1923. On the basis of a thorough analysis of class relationships in the state, the program was supposed to offer the party legal, constitutional modalities for the practice of a systematic reform policy that in time was to lead to a socialist society and to the socialization of the most important means of production.[47] The program, however, did

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[45] Drechsler, FN1,1

[46] P. Levi, "Warum gehen wir zur Vereinigten Sozialdemoktatischen Partei?", in *Zwischen Spartakus und Sozialdemokratie* (Frankfurt/M.: EVA, 1969), passim

[47] Abendroth, 58

not contain a realistic sociological analysis of the concrete power relationships in the republic or of the state apparatus, which would have pointed out the "creeping" putschist tendencies of the reactionary right-wing forces, and would have enabled the SPD to defend the constitution. Instead, the Social Democrats developed a "state consciousness" that belied the power-political situation in Germany at the time.[48]

The Social Democrat Left Opposition strongly opposed this attitude towards the state. Its members pointed out that the Weimar Republic, far from being an equitable state, offering all its citizens the same rights and chances for justice and success, was still a state advancing the interests of the bourgeoisie, which still controlled the army, the courts, the state bureaucracy and many other important state institutions.[49] The SPD's participation in coalition governments gave legitimacy to the bourgeois parties in the eyes of the proletariat and created the false impression that the bourgeoisie and the socialists had common goals. The reforms that the Social Democrats could achieve in a coalition with the bourgeois parties, the Left reiterated, could only be of limited scope, or would come under attack as soon as the forces of capitalism felt strong enough, as the large industrialists' assault on the eight-hour work day proved. More damning even, the participation of the SPD in the government forced it to acquiesce in repressive measures against the working class whose real initiators were the reactionary forces that still controlled the state. Social Democracy should only form the government when having a majority, and when it can dictate policy; until then, the SPD should always form the

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[48] ibidem

[49] Richard N. Hunt, 222; K. Schönhoven, *Reformismus und Radikalismus* (Muenchen: DTV, 1989), 143

opposition.[50]

Opposition, however, did not mean sterile negation. In December 1922, shortly after the SPD's exit from the government and the inauguration of a bourgeois coalition under chancellor Cuno, Paul Levi wrote:

> We imagine opposition significantly differently than, say, the 'communists'—at least, those in the Reichstag who call themselves that— ; [we reject] their "sharp and radical" opposition that finds its acme in absolute negation, and which sees its rigid consistency confirmed by the level of invective and the absence of thought in their speeches whenever they brand any thoughtful approach to the bourgeois state as high treason of the cause of the proletariat. In reality, opposition is the expression of the will and attitude of a differently oriented social stratum or class in regards to any political problem, while seeking to secure with that expression the consent of the majority of its compatriots. Therefore, even in a bourgeois state, and even to bourgeois parties, opposition is no effete negation and no renouncement to political effectiveness.[51]

His words reflected the thoughts of most members of the Left both on opposition in the bourgeois state and on communist political strategy in the democratic state. Left Social Democrats advocated for an SPD that had to continue to militate vigorously for the ongoing transformation of the state into a socialist polity. The uneasy *modus vivendi* with the bourgeois forces that the SPD establishment had settled into and its policy to stabilize this system went against the Left's beliefs. The leftists insisted that the party had to have social protest as its core principle, fight for extensive socialization in the industry, seek to transform the army into a peoples' force and strengthen its ties with foreign social democratic parties for the purpose of a world-wide socialist revolution.[52] On the other hand, as already indicated, the Left contested the KPD's strategies and tactics. It abhorred

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[50] Hunt, ibid.
[51] Paul Levi. "Opposition", in *Zwischen Spartakus und Sozialdemokratie*, 185
[52] Hunt, 223

communists' insurrectionary adventurism as well as its undemocratic legacy and all too manifest present. Levi himself, having been the leader of the KPD from the assassination of Liebknecht and Luxemburg until his exclusion for his scathing condemnation of the 1921 Comintern-initiated *Märzaktion*, knew all about and had written often on the heavy hand of the Russian communists, the canonization of Leninism and the inflexibility of Zinoviev's Comintern that was stifling the communist movement. Most leftists, while sympathetic towards the Soviet Union, rejected its tutelage and looked for guidance in the revolutionary tradition established by August Bebel, pre-war Karl Kautsky and Luxemburg rather than Lenin, Stalin or Trotsky.[53] Levi wrote a sharp critique of a Trotsky book claiming that the KPD had missed a unique opportunity to stage a Soviet-style revolution in Germany in October 1923.[54] He criticized the Bolshevik's arrogance, their sense of entitlement in dictating other national communist parties how and when to act, their lack of self-criticism when their predictions failed to materialize, and the undemocratic regime that the Soviets were quickly establishing.

The Klassenkampf Group

By 1927, the swelling numbers of the Left had made it necessary to establish a specific organ that allowed its members unfettered expression, something that was problematic in the many SPD newspapers and periodicals. In October of the same year, this materialized in the semimonthly *Der Klassenkampf - Marxistische Blätter* (The Class Struggle-a Marxist Publication). Its publishers were Max Seydewitz, Dr. Kurt Rosenfeld,

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[53] Hunt, 224

[54] Levi, "Einleitung zu Trotzki: '1917-Die Lehren der Revolution'", in *Zwischen Spartakus*, 138-147

Heinrich Ströbel and the Austrian Marxist sociologist and philosopher, Max Adler, who was also one of the Left's main theoreticians.[55] It is not clear why Levi's SPW could not alone serve as the mouthpiece for the Left; perhaps as a founder and owner of the paper, he cast too long a shadow over its content; on the other hand, there were reports that he had some personal and political reservations towards the group around Seydewitz.[56] A year later, in October 1928, encouraged by the vigour of the new periodical, Levi amalgamated his SPW with Der Klassenkampf and became a co-publisher.

Right away, Der Klassenkampf received contributions from the best minds of the SPD Left. Close collaborators and faithful subscribers to the periodical became known as the *Klassenkampf-Gruppe*. They aimed to bring the policies of the SPD more in line with Marxist theory. In practice that meant an uncompromising opposition to bourgeois politics particularly on military, social, and economic issues.[57] The leaders of the group had been associated with the USPD, or with the Social Democratic youth organisations like the *Sozialistische Arbeiter-Jugend* (Socialist Workers' Youth, SAJ). The group's political strategy was heavily based on Adler's brand of Austromarxism, which aimed to forge a dialectical synthesis between reform and revolution.[58]

The *Klassenkampf* received most of its support in Saxony, Thuringia, Berlin, Breslau and Frankfurt/Main, with no particular age group dominating its membership. While there was a high number of university graduates and intellectuals among its leadership, the group and the periodical did not cater to the well educated. In fact, the

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[55] Abendroth, 60

[56] Drechsler, 23, E. V. Rengstorf. *Linksopposition in der Weimarer Republik. Die "Klassenkampf Gruppe" 1928-1931.* (Hannover: SOAK, 1976), 10-15

[57] Schönhoven, 142

[58] ibid.

Left in general and later the SAP received most of its votes in the proletarian ridings of Saxony, Thuringia and the cities mentioned above. More significant for the parliament-fixated politics of the group is the fact that its hard core, the publishers of the periodical and other regular contributors like Prof. Anna Siemsen and Dr. Kurt Löwenstein, were members of the Reichstag.[59]

The quintessential difference between the Left Opposition—the *Klassenkampf* group and its supporters—and the SPD establishment was the attitude towards the character of the republic and of the state, which in turn dictated both wings' philosophical approach to the issue of government coalitions with bourgeois parties. The SPD national leadership viewed the Weimar democratic republic as a "neutral" state, representing the interests of no particular class, and in which the SPD could effectively promote the interests of the working class simply by participating in the government.[60] This essentially revisionist stance rested on new theoretical social democratic writings, notably by SPD leader Rudolf Hilferding, which sharply departed from Marxist orthodoxy. Hilferding, like many other economists, observed that the broad integration and cartelising of capitalist economies pointed to a change in the capitalist system that contradicted the Marxist model of a system inherently beset by crises and contradictions. In this new system, free competition was replaced by a sort of socialist production planning, or "planned capitalism", indicated by the integration of production, commercial and financial resources.[61] These real developments led to the thesis of a "crises-free"

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[59] Ernst-Viktor Rengstorf, 14; Hunt, 224
[60] Hunt, 222
[61] Rengstorf, 6; Drechsler, 17

capitalism to which bourgeois and many social democrat economists alike subscribed. In such a situation, the working class had a very powerful position through its political position in the state and its capability to influence the capitalist economy, which had to depend on the state for marshalling the resources necessary for its complex functioning. Thus, the capitalist system was inexorably steered toward a socialist system by the intervention of the state in which the working class and its representatives (SPD, trade unions, etc.) had decisive powers. In these conditions, the political contradictions between capitalism and socialism were fading.[62]

The Left Opposition totally rejected this view. Its understanding of the state was thoroughly Marxist, and was supported by recent theoretical comments by Adler[63]:

> . . . Real democracy is not possible in the State. According to Marx, the word State has a fixed and well determined meaning. By State we understand a form of organization of society based on the economic antagonisms of the classes and in which one or several classes dominate other classes. In such forms of organization social order rests necessarily on domination. The dominating classes impose their will on others in the form of laws. . .[The bourgeois] state is a class state, which is a *non-solidaristic* form of society.

Adler compared the German society after 1918 with the French society after 1789: just because the monarchy had been overthrown, it did not follow that true democracy had been installed. What had been achieved was the replacement of one form of state with another. But the real source of social injustice, economic inequalities, was not

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[62] Rengsdorf, ibid.; Drechsler, 18; Dietmar Klenke, *Die SPD-Linke in der Weimarer Republik*. (Münster: 1987), 101

[63] Max Adler, *Démocratie politique et démocratie sociale* (Bruxelles: l'Eglantine, 1930), 89 N.B. While this work appeared in French translation in 1930, Adler discussed these ideas in numerous prior books and articles, notably in the first issue of *Der Klassenkampf*, 1 (1927), in his article "Ueber Marxistische Staatsauffassung". This is the only Adler book available in the libraries of the University of Alberta.

eradicated.[64] Social Democracy, according to Adler and the Left Opposition had the mission of eliminating these economic disparities, pushing for socialization of the most important sectors of the economy, limiting and controlling the Reichswehr, and maintaining the hard-earned, state financed social services for the proletariat and the dispossessed. Since the bourgeois parties and the groups they represented (the big industry, the East Elbian agrarians, the military elites, etc) were all against these objectives, there was no point in cooperating with them politically, as any bourgeois agenda was ultimately aimed against working-class interests.

The clash between these ideas and the reformist stance of the SPD executive became unavoidable at the SPD's party conference at Kiel in 1927. Here, the SPD adopted Hilferding's theory as the official party view, which in turn assured that the party would conduct a coalition policy in parliament, whereby the SPD would participate in the government even if it included rabid anti-labour parties like the German National People's Party (DNVP). The Left's call for adoption of the tactical principle "*Opposition statt Koalition*" ("opposition instead of coalition") was rebuffed by the SPD.[65] Its executive accused the Left of being unparliamentary, "incapable of politics" ("*politikunfähig*") and of undermining the republic.[66] Otto Wels, the party's president, and others accused Levi's group of disloyalty. The Left denounced these reactions as further proof of the eroding inner-party democracy and an attempt to muzzle all dissenting voices.[67]

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[64] Adler, 64-66
[65] Drechsler, 19; Rengstorf, 8
[66] Klenke, 1-3
[67] Drechsler, ibid.

The *Klassenkampf* group, then, advocated a militant, revolutionary SPD, not an accommodating, reformist one. The publishers clearly stated this in the first issue of the periodical on 1 October 1927:

> *Der Klassenkampf* intends to interpret all political problems of the day from a Marxist point of view, and thereby contribute to the deepening of the realization that, even inside the democratic republic, the struggle for the liberation of the working class cannot be conducted other than by fierce defence of its interests. It does so in clear recognition of the fact that the front lines in the German republic are not drawn anymore according to the slogan: monarchism versus republicanism, but according to the real antagonism: socialism versus capitalism. Thus, *Der Klassenkampf* hopes to strengthen the political effectiveness of the Marxist theory inside today's Social Democracy, because it is convinced that only the politics of proletarian struggle can enable the party to rouse the toiling masses, gather them around itself and wrest the political power.[68]

The Left's opposition to the SPD's coalition policy

In practical political terms, these ideas translated into KK-G's strong and vocal opposition against the SPD's coalition policy with bourgeois parties, and later, against the SPD's toleration of Brüning's presidential regimes. A test case for both the Left and for the official SPD position on coalitions came in the summer of 1928. The SPD had won the May 1928 federal elections by a great margin (almost 30% of the votes) and was dominating the Reichstag. To the executive, this victory was clear proof of the correctness of the party line. The Left, however, warned that success at the polls was irrelevant if it did not translate into political changes and a social policy benefiting the working class. Soon, the Left's reservations proved correct. Despite SPD's electoral victory, neither it nor the Weimar coalition (SPD, the German Democratic party, or DDP

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[68] *Klassenkampf* - "Unser Program!" in KK 1, Nr. 1, Oct. 1, 1927, pg. 2, quoted in Max Seydewitz, *Es hat sich gelohnt zu leben* (Berlin: Dietz, 1976), 172

and the Centre Party) could form a majority. The SPD was forced to enter a grand coalition including the bourgeois Bavarian People's Party (*Beyerische Volkspartei* or BVP) and the conservative German People's Party (*Deutsche Volkspartei* or DVP), which represented mainly the interests of factory and business owners and management. The DVP, under the pressure of its right wing, drove a hard bargain and promised to paralyse the government unless business friendly (but labour averse) policies were implemented.[69] The SPD was essentially ready for concessions. This was also clearly visible in its choice for Chancellor as the party favoured the moderate Hermann Müller rather the more popular and talented premier of Prussia, Otto Braun, who was perceived as a radical authoritarian.[70] Once at work, the coalition government, in which, with four, the SPD had the most ministers, satisfied none of the demands that the Left deemed imperative if the party was to join any coalition, such as an improved social policy or, more importantly, the reform of the Reichswehr.[71] But the crisis over the building of the armoured cruiser "A" clearly showed that the Left's misgivings were correct.

The cruiser was a remnant from the previous management, the *Bürgerblock* (bourgeois coalition) cabinet of Chancellor Wilhelm Marx. This government had approved 9.3 million RM for the initial expenditures towards building the pocket cruiser against the adamant opposition of SPD delegates, who campaigned for the May elections under the slogan "Nourishment for the children instead of armoured cruisers" (*Kinderspeisung statt Panzerkreuzer*). But now the Müller government showed its intention to allow the cruiser to be built with the explanation that the project had been

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[69] Drechsler, 33
[70] Schaefer, 40
[71] Drechsler, 34

approved by parliament under the previous administration, and therefore a legally binding obligation. Seydewitz, Rosenfeld and many other members of the KK-G wrote and spoke often to show that this explanation was false; the obligation applied only to preliminary, preparatory work, not for the actual building of the vessel. This fact was so evident that even the SPD executive, the SPD parliamentary fraction and the SPD leadership protested the decision of the government.[72] But the Left was unsatisfied with solely condemning the conduct of the Social Democrat ministers in this particular event; the KK-G and its sympathisers claimed that SPD compromises to the agenda of the bourgeois parties was the "unavoidable consequence of the weak policy of coalitions, whose proponents were adamant that after the May 1928 federal elections, Social Democracy has to sit in the government together with the bourgeois parties."[73] The Left often made it clear that it was not against any and all coalitions (although all coalitions involving the DNVP were excluded). Such joint projects involving the Centre Party and the DDP were even approved as long as it benefited the working class. But during the Müller government, the Left complained, that the SPD was brought into the decisions when a majority was needed to advance foreign policy, while when financial, social and economic issues were decided, the bourgeois parties enacted without SPD involvement policies directed against the labour movement.[74]

In its continued quest against the building of the armoured cruiser and the policy that permitted it, in October 1928, the KK-G published the brochure The Armoured Cruiser and Social Democracy ("*Panzerkreuzer und Sozialdemokatie*") in order to

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[72] Drechsler, 36; Rengstorf, 35
[73] Seydewitz, "Die Schädigung der Partei", in KK 2 (1928), 515, quoted in Drechsler, 37
[74] Klenke, 10

disseminate its ideas more widely and keep opposition inside the party alive. This publication prevented the issue from being forgotten, so that on October 31 the SPD parliamentary fraction proposed a motion for stopping the work on the cruiser. Party discipline in this case created the absurd and embarrassing situation in which the SPD ministers had to vote with the fraction against the decision of the cabinet of which they were a part . In the end the motion was defeated anyway, but the Left's fight against the coalition policy did not abate.[75]

Beginning in the latter part of 1928 and into 1929, the main challenge of the SPD was to stave off big capital's assault on the socialist aspects of the German economic system. With the onset of the economic crisis, big capital claimed that trade union bargaining rights, compulsory state arbitration, aspects of the unemployment insurance and the welfare state in general were obstacles to economic recovery. Eventually the conflict centred around unemployment insurance.[76] Higher unemployment put tremendous pressure on assistance programs. The SPD agreed with the trade unions that the situation could be redressed by raising contributions to the funds. The DVP, who represented the interests of the employers, opposed this solution and asked that benefits be reduced instead. With the compulsory state arbitration already weakened by the employers' November 1928 illegal lock-out of 220,000 iron and steel workers in the Ruhr, the unemployment insurance remained the last great accomplishment of the 1918 revolution the labour movement still benefited from, now a "symbol of the hard-won

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[75] Rengstorf, 38, Drechsler39
[76] Drechsler, 51

social policy of the post-war era."[77] Repeated efforts of the SPD policy makers to produce a compromise were rejected by its bourgeois coalition partners, who wanted a clean sweep of the social dimension of the Weimar state, but also by the Left Opposition and by many moderate Social Democrats who realised that any compromise was just the first stumble on a slippery slope. Finally, aware that further concessions would gravely damage the party's image and drive out members to the Left (many had already defected to the KPD), the SPD executive refused to support the reduction in unemployment benefits and resigned from the government on March 27, 1930.[78]

The demise of the coalition government (it turned out to be the last democratic regime of the Weimar era) amply vindicated the SPD Left opposition. Especially in the conditions of rapidly advancing recession, the SPD's efforts to maintain the Great Coalition did not benefit the working class; in fact, they worked against it. Under the SPD watch, military budgets and expeditures increased while social programs were reduced. In the second half of 1929, in an attempt to redress the economy, SPD Minister of Economic Affairs, Rudolf Hilferding, reduced taxes on property and capital (which benefited the upper classes) and raised consumer taxes, hitting the already suffering masses hard—all in the name of maintaining the coalition. But more disconcerting was the overall erosion of the party image among the electorate. Small successes could not justify the growing perception of the SPD as a care-taker of bourgeois interests. The Left could also clearly point out that the party suffered election losses after each stint of

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[77] Helga Timm. *Die Deutsche Sozialpolitik und der Bruch der grossen Koalition im März 1930.* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1952), 128

[78] Drechsler, 53

service in coalition governments.[79] For the KK-G the end of this political arrangement could not come soon enough. This disastrous policy, the Left claimed, drove thousands of workers to the KPD and the NSDAP.[80]

The Left against the toleration of the Brüning regimes

The next administration was a bourgeois minority government under the leadership of Center Party economist Heinrich Brüning. Right away, the SPD opposed this government's program of solving the country's financial situation. Several austerity motions were voted down. The Left could also immediately trumpet the success of the opposition policy when the first allocation of funds for the construction of a second armoured cruiser was soundly defeated by the votes of the SPD.[81] When, on July 16, 1930, another government austerity program was rejected by the SPD, President Hindenburg abused his powers under article 48 of the Constitution and imposed the program through an emergency decree. A few days later, the SPD advanced a motion in the Reichstag to have the decree rescinded. Immediately, Brüning had the Reichstag dissolved by another presidential decree, a clear indication of his anti-parliamentary stance. This act marked the first step away from democracy toward authoritarian rule. But, the incapability of the opposition to countenance any compromise, and the resulting parliamentary paralysis, also "opened the door for the formation of an uncompromising opposition of an artificial majority left and right from the shrinking Weimar parties."[82]

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[79] Klenke, 118
[80] Rengstorf, 48-54
[81] Drechsler, 56
[82] Bracher, 340

Thus, in the following elections, the SPD lost 600,000 votes. But, because four more million voters cast ballots than in the previous elections, the relative loss was two million votes. The KPD, meanwhile, gained 1.3 million votes. The most staggering success, however, was registered by the Nazis, who jumped from 810,000 (1928) to 6.4 million votes. With 107 deputies, the NSDAP was now the second strongest party in the Reichstag. Following the elections, Brüning formed another minority government, which the SPD tolerated as a "lesser evil" to a possible alternative DNVP-NSDAP government and fascist dictatorship. The SPD Left soon denounced this policy and did so until its split a year later. However, the Left was unable to devise a feasible alternative without risking a facist government.[83]

The SPD tolerated Brüning's emergency decrees of July and December 1930 in which it accepted unpopular emergency and spending reduction measures. Brüning's financial policy was dictated by the effects of the depression and by conditions imposed by the Allies for the temporary suspension of reparations payments. The conditions precluded any inflationary policies; this meant a virtual exclusion of all budget deficits.[84] This in turn meant a drastic reduction of government spending. The chancellor targeted social services for cuts, eliminated jobs in public administration and reduced unemployment payments. To increase revenue, his government raised taxes on lower incomes and increased consumer taxes on sugar, beer, mineral water and tobacco. Evidently, it was the working class and the lower middle class who bore the brunt of the recovery plan. The only positive effect Brüning's deflationary policy had was to stop

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[83] Drechsler, 57
[84] Rengstorf, 64

reparation payments temporarily (and later, permanently). The increased unemployment, and the reduced purchasing power of those who still had work, further depressed the domestic economy. By tolerating the government, the impression was created that the SPD was supporting its plan, even going so far as to approve a budget that, yet again, was allocating funds for the constuction of a new armoured cruiser. Bitter dissatisfaction with this policy drove many unemployed and middle class citizens into the ranks of the NSDAP and the KPD.

In fact, for the SPD, tolerating the government was "a policy without alternatives."[85] The party needed to continue to control Prussia and its police in order to effectively fight the Nazis, and for this they depended on the regional Centre Party with which they ruled the *Land* in a coalition. Whenever the SPD objected to Brüning's federal policies, he threatened to resign and end the arrangement in Prussia. There was also a theoretical underpinning to this political line. As already discussed, Hilferding's theory of "organized capitalism" maintained that the rational character of the state tended to favour intervention in order to moderate or even eliminate the anarchic elements of the capitalist economy for the benefit of society. Crises were invariably followed by social progress. As the executive regarded the current recession as no different from preceding ones (according to theoretician Fritz Naphtali), it was important to keep the course. Although the ruling government was a reactionary one, it did not seem to aim at destroying parliamentarism, whereas a NSDAP-DNVP coalition admittedly did. In order to save the Weimar democracy, therefore, the SPD had to tolerate the Brüning

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[85] H.A. Winkler. *Weimar 1918-1933. Die Geschichte der ersten deutschen Demokratie* (München: Beck, 1993), 396

government.[86]

The KK-G rejected the "organized capitalism" theory. In its analysis the raging depression was far from being a manifestation of cyclical crises but rather the final phase of an economic system collapsing under the burden of its built-in contradictions. Attempts to solve the crisis with capitalist methods would only make matters worse. The old system had to be replaced with a socialist system, and this was the task of the working class under the direction of the SPD.

This point of view was publicised in dozens of articles in *Der Klassenkampf*. To reach a wider audience, and in order to present a more elaborate theory on the recession, capitalism and its connection to fascism, the KK-G (and later, SAP) started to publish a number of volumes in a series entitled "The Red Books of the Marxist Book Community" (*Roten Bücher der Marxistischen Büchergemeinde*). The first title in this series was *The Crisis of Capitalism and the Task of the Working Class* published at the end of 1930. It consisted of a collection of essays by Seydewitz, Adler, Franz Petrich, Eduard Weckerle and Engelbert Graf, that attempted to outline the task of the SPD and of the working class in the conditions of "world crisis of the capitalist system..., not only in its economic dimension, but also in its political and cultural aspects."[87]

Graf surveyed the economic and political changes in the world since the mid 1800s. He showed how imperialism was dictated by competitive pressures inherent in the capitalist production system, and how it had led to World War One. He then analysed how the industrial changes during the war, the Versailles Treaty and the Russian

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[86] Rengstorf, 69-71

[87] M. Adler. "Die Soziale Revolution", in *Die Krise des Kapitalismus und die Aufgabe der Arbeiterklasse.* (Berlin: Marxistische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1930), 141

Revolution had compounded problems for the bourgeoisie and capitalism. The shrinking world markets; increased competition from newcomers in global commerce; aggressive pursuit of raw materials sources; overproduction from a bloated war industry; reduced consumer buying power due to high unemployment as a result of rationalisation—all of these factors threatened capitalism and its profits and made a new world war imminent. In many countries, Graf claimed, the bourgeoisie would support fascism in order to secure the political power that will enable it to wage the war necessary to maintain economic and social supremacy.[88]

Next, Weckerle analysed in detail what recent aspects of the capitalist system produced the unfolding recession. Cartelisation of industry led to "ironclad" prices that prevented the sale of excessive output realised during the increased production of the rationalisation years. This situation was aggravated by the shrinking of global markets and by the fact that simultaneous agricultural crises around the world had drastically reduced the sale of industrial products to agrarian cosumers. What was more revealing about the dystopic character of capitalism, however, was the fact that technical progress as expressed by rationalisation and overabundence translated into unemployment and bitter crisis under the current system. Organized capitalism proved to be "organized nonsense."[89] In their chase for profits, capitalists controlled prices and supply in a manner that led to the pauperisation of the rural population everywhere and declassed the middle class into proletariat. The conclusion was that the social system was not adequate

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[88] E. Graf. "Weltwirtschaftliche Strukturwandlung der Kriegs- und Nachkriegszeit" in *Die Krise des Kapitalismus*, 9-50

[89] E. Weckerle. "Die Krise des Kapitalismus", ibid., 64

anymore for the technical level of productive organisation and had to be changed.[90]

It was the task of the proletariat under the leadership of the SPD to effect this change, wrote Seydewitz.[91] However, in order for the SPD to regain its leadership role and the credibility it once had, it had to abandon the coalition and toleration policy, and more fundamentaly, its reformist philosophy. In the preceding essay, Seydewitz explained that the SPD's identification with the Weimar bourgeois democratic state and its failures had damaged its image as representative of the working class and of the underprivileged in society. This had the compounded negative effect of splitting the labour movement and of losing support to the opportunistic and demagogic NSDAP.[92] The SPD's presence in many local and regional governments, despite the good intentions, helped to create the impression that the party was responsible for the economic crisis and that it had no plan to alleviate it. Meanwhile, the bourgeois capitalists, the real culprits for the depression, worked through bourgeois parties to preserve their power and erode that of the proletariat. By not making sufficiently clear who was responsible for the crisis, the SPD served unwittingly as a "lightning arrester" for the ire that should hit the capitalists directly.[93]

Therefore Seydewitz proposed that the SPD end immediately the coalition and toleration policy, educate the masses about the real causes and promoters of the depression, develop a clear parliamentary and extra-parliamentary strategy to prevent the bourgeoisie from fighting the depression on the backs of the proletariat, and form a united front with the

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[90] ibid., 51-106
[91] M. Seydewitz. "Die Aufgabe der Arbeiterklasse", ibid., 129-140
[92] Seydewitz. "Die politische Auswirkung der Krise des Kapitalismus", ibid., 107-128
[93] ibid., 111

trade unions and the KPD with the goal of eliminating the capitalist mode of production and bringing on socialism.

Adler also claimed that it was now "clear that capitalism, with its modern development, had got stuck in a dead end, because it was incapable of solving its contradictions with its own methods."[94] Unable to convince even its own offspring of the progressive character of capitalism, the leaders of the reactionary bourgeoisie would resort to any violence to maintain their grip on the state, including supporting a fascist dictatorship. That is why the SPD erred in its coalition policy. The goal of the party had to be to go beyond political democracy (a situation that the bourgeoisie was able to manipulate to maintain power) to social and economic democracy by accelerating the revolution that was implacably at work. As explained by Marx and Engels, Adler wrote, the sharpening contradictions between the mode of production and the forces of production made a social revolution imminent.[95] In fact, historically, the time was ripe for this revolution. All that was necessary was for the proletariat to prove it was mature enough to lead and initiate its progress. But before that could happen reformism had to be abandoned, or else "the great moment would find an unworthy generation."[96]

With this remark, Adler, like the rest of the contributors, directed an unmistakable attack on the reformism of the SPD executive. The leaders of the party were too keen to preserve the status quo; they failed to recognize that what was progress in 1918 was regress in 1931. The KK-G writers argued that German social democracy had to lead the way out of the bourgeois republic into a socialist one. Coalition with the bourgeoisie was

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[94] M. Adler. "Die Soziale Revolution", ibid., 141
[95] ibid., 149
[96] ibid., 159

self-defeating. In the moment of crisis, the ruling classes were forging ties with the leaders of the fascist movement in order to do away with Weimar democracy and install a totalitarian order. Furthermore, by tolerating the Brüning regime (with its anti-democratic, anti-republican agenda) the SPD was cornered into political immobilism and was paving the way to fascism. This had to end immediately.

The KK-G hoped to put all these issues on the agenda of the SPD congress that was to take place in June 1931 in Leipzig. This failed. The SPD executive was in complete disagreement with the assessments of the Left. The policy of toleration had to continue because the alternative was much worse, they maintained. Rudolf Breitscheid, a member of the executive, did not deny that the Brüning regime had undermined the democratic constitution, but "[the SPD] had to tolerate the harm done to the form of the constitution in order to save its democratic content."[97] The executive adroitly used its control of the procedures to direct debate away from the issues the Left wanted discussed, and instead criticised members of the Left for various breaches of party discipline and for publicistic activity it regarded as detrimental to organizational unity. During debates, it became increasingly clear that the executive was losing patience with Left's criticism, particularly when the latter castigated declining organizational democracy.[98] Recently, the KK-G had published an other book in its *Roten Bücher* series, this time on the subject of the evolution and future of the SPD. The authors had many critical things to say about the direction the party was taking, but they also had a good many proposals to right the ship and restore the organization as the flag bearer of the proletariat in its fight against

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[97] Protocol of the SPD Congress, Leipzig, 1931, p.103, quoted in Drechsler, 66
[98] Drechsler, 76-78

fascism and toward a better society.[99]

The Left's critique of the SPD

The perceived transformation of the SPD into an undemocratic, pragmatic and bureaucratic organization had been a subject of analysis among social democrats for a long time. Moderate (Mierendorff, Leber, Rathmann, Geyer) and radical-left socialists had decried for years the shift the party seemed to experience, from a democratic mass movement inspired by dreams of a better world and social revolution to an efficient electoral machine guided by practical political considerations. In dozens of articles, the KK-G had endeavoured to rally the SPD membership around the idea that the party had to abandon its reformist recent past and revert to its revolutionary traditions. The volume entitled *The Organization in the Class Struggle* discussed the militant history of the SPD, its change into an increasingly rigid political apparatus and the reforms proposed by the Left for the reinvigoration of the party.

In the first essay, Otto Jenssen examined the history of the first independent proletarian organisations in the larger European states, particularly in the nineteenth century.[100] Tracing the evolution of these organisations in Germany, he pointed to the political and economic successes that the SPD and the free trade unions had registered in the last forty years. However, Jenssen warned, in the process of differentiation, these organisations were losing some of their unity. They had to guard now against the "exacerbation of group egoisms, . . . and against 'practical men' and 'Realpolitiker'" who

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[99] *Die Organisation im Klassenkampf* (Berlin: Marxistische Verlagsgesellschaft, 1931)
[100] O. Jensen. "Von der Revolte zur Massenorganisation", ibid., 9-30

deviated from the teachings of Marx and Engels toward revisionism.[101] With the creation of a political apparatus inside the proletarian organisation, and the appearance of the cadre, Jenssen continued, we witness organisational fetishism; the organisation becomes, for some, a purpose in itself rather than the means to the purpose of the class struggle.[102]

In a much more thorough analysis of the German Social Democratic organisation, Fritz Bieligk discussed the trends and the challenges the SPD was facing.[103] He noted that up to 1914 the leadership of the SPD among the proletariat was practically unchallenged. Not only did its policies correpond with the interests of the working class, but its progressive, humanitarian views were attracting supporters from outside the proletariat. During and after the war, however, a shift occurred. Its increasing bureaucratization (which started some time before the Great War), the inherent tendency toward stability that most great organisations manifest, one the one hand, and the progressive involvement in the running of the state, on the other hand, had as effects a departure from the revolutionary ethos of the party and the adoption of a gradualist, reformist mentality. According to this mentality, the proletariat was to achieve its goals through competent parliamentary work by SPD politicians backed by the mighty Social Democratic organization. This philosophy alienated a large section of the working class, as evidenced not only by the traumatic split and formation of the USPD, but also by the spontaneous formation of the Soldiers' and Workers' Councils and of the Revolutionary Shop Stewards during the war and revolution. Those Germans who joined these militant

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[101] ibid., 28
[102] ibid., 29
[103] F. Bieligk. "Die Entwicklung der sozialdemokratischen Organisation in Deutschland", ibid., 31-81; also, in the same volume, a similar point of view in Helmut Wagner, "Organisation und Klasse", 83-130

groups felt that they were not represented by either the SPD or the USPD.[104]

The Weimar corporatist tripartite republic composed of the state, organized labour, and employers, seemed to justify both the revisionism of SPD theoreticians and the reformism of the executive and of the free trade unions through its successes represented by the ZAG, compulsory state arbitration and collective bargaining. The 1923-24 period of hyperinflation showed, however, that the captains of the heavy industry were committed to the new state of affairs and were only waiting for the right moment to put an end to the "trade union state."

Despite this and other clear evidence that important reactionary groups planned the demise of the republic, the SPD and the free trade unions continued with the reformist and coalitionist policies. To the bourgeois parties, the SPD was a "reliable" (*zuverlässig*) political partner, a party of "*Ruhe, Ordnung und Sicherheit*" (peace, order and public safety).[105] This political line, Bieligk claimed, drastically reduced the party's popularity. By 1920, the USPD was almost as large as the SPD, and despite the 1922 re-unification, the party's ranks dwindled.

There were also other factors that weakened the organization or even drove scores of members to leave the party, Bieligk wrote. Excessive organization, organizational fragmentation and demands on members' free time and money led to organizational fatigue.[106] Also, there occurred a de-politicization of organizational life, especially at the local level, where theoretical discussions on Marxism, on militant socialist politics or revolution practically disappeared. Bieligk claimed that this de-politicization was

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[104] ibid., 41-49
[105] ibid., 50; on the reformism of the SPD and the free trade unions also see Wagner 94-121
[106] ibid., 62-65

intentionally imposed by the executive in order to reduce opposition to reformism.[107]

But, probably the most damaging to the party's unity was the erosion of organizational democracy and the progressive monopolization of power in the hands of the executive. This was evident from developments such as marginalization and muzzling of youth members[108]; tight control and censorship of opinions expressed in the party press[109]; manipulation of election and nomination processes to ensure that control bodies such as the Control Commission (*Kontrollkommission*) and the Party Committee (*Parteiausschuß*) were in fact subordinated to the executive[110]; and arbitrary assumption of additional powers by the executive that were not in accordance with the party's statute[111]. The gradual erosion of democracy in the organization was epitomized by the slow but steady transformation of the Party Congress from a plenum of delegates elected by local organizations to a perfunctory sanctioning body chosen at regional congresses by bureaucrats according to the executive's directions.[112] The degeneration of the SPD from a democratic organization into an oligarchic one boded ill, the Left feared, both for its growth and for its capacity to fend off capitalist or fascist reaction.

In the conclusion of the volume, Ernst Eckstein reiterated that the SPD could only retain its relevance if it spoke for all of the working class, particularly for its core in the great industrial centres. But, he warned, "when the present form of the organization contains the danger (and we have to admit that it does) of not being able to give a strong

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[107] ibid., 66; also on this, in the same volume Kurt Laumann's "Organisation und Apparat", 135
[108] ibid., 61; also Laumann, 136
[109] ibid., 68-69
[110] ibid., 71-74
[111] ibid., 75
[112] Hunt, 78; also Laumann, 136-139

voice in the party to the will of the industrial proletariat corresponding to its strenght and importance in society, then a change has to happen."[113] Immediate changes had to include devolving control of regional newspapers to local organizations for more freedom of expression; regular election of party secretaries by local party cells, rather than their nomination and imposition (*von der oberen Instanz auf die Nase gesetzt wird*) by executive order; reduction of party centralization by limiting the interference of the excutive in how SPD deputies in the Reichstag were voting; and restoring a larger measure of democracy to the functioning of the Party Congress by limiting drastically the number of unelected functionaries who had voting rights, which at the time was one hundred out of a total of three hundred votes cast in the Congress.[114] To make these changes permanent, however, the party's statute needed to be altered. In an addendum to the volume, Eckstein published a reduced version of the SPD statute on the left side of the page, while on the right side he printed his own version of how the statute should have been modified in order to make the SPD more Marxist and more democratic.[115]

This volume, like most of the work published by the KK-G, was received very negatively by the SPD executive. In a report at the Leipzig Party Congress, Max Westphal, a member of the executive, had this to say about the newly published book:

> Even in communist or national socialist publications is hard to find as heavy a criticism as party comrades direct against party comrades in this book. . . I hope that we are all unanimous that such mischief, which can no longer be called deviation, but in which a certain clear intention can be seen (hear, hear!), has to be eliminated and not be allowed to happen again.[116]

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[113] E. Eckstein. "Wie soll die Organisation aussehen?", ibid., 159
[114] ibid., 156, 160, 163, 164; see also Hunt , 78
[115] Eckstein. "Vorschläge zu einer Abänderung des Organisationsstatut der SPD', ibid., 166-179
[116] Protocol of the Leipzig Party Congress, pg. 240, quoted in Drechsler, 78

Friedrich Stampfer, the chief editor of the party's main organ *Vorwärts* said:

> Seydewitz and his friends are facing the choice between continuing to manoeuvre themselves towards the periphery and, possibly even outside the party, and gaining recognition for their ideas.[117]

These and other similar comments bear evidence that the executive feared that a deliberate fracticious group was at work. Research had established that, at this time, the Left Opposition did not contemplate a schism but merely a necessary (they thought) shake up of the party.[118] They were willing to wait for their suggestions to sink in and were sanguine over the impact of their activities despite the official rejection they had experienced in Leipzig.

Their hopes were soon dashed, as the SPD continued its policy of toleration despite government's renewal of the state of emergency in June 1931— a decree that hit the proletariat hardest with cuts in the unemployment insurance funds and other social services while allocating money for construction of warships. As already mentioned, a very important reason for this course was the SPD's determination to maintain power in Prussia although even Otto Braun, the Social Democrat premier of the *Land*, doubted it was possible.[119] The KK-G took, nonetheless, immediate action by publishing a "Warning cry to the party" (*Mahnruf an die Partei)* in the first issue of *Der Klassenkampf* in July:

> Despite the fact that the Leipzig Party Congress has put the Social Democrat Reichstag fraction under the obligation to resolutely oppose any detrimental change to the unemployment insurance program, the fraction [...] has accepted the new state of emergency and the decisions tied to it, particularly those which worsen the condition of the unemployment insurance program and, thereby, the

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[117] Drechsler, 79
[118] Klenke, 212; Drechsler, 82
[119] O. Braun. *Von Weimar zu Hitler*, 166; 178

> situation of the working class. The fraction, then, has not done its duty to resist. As we did with the policy of toleration, we also oppose this decision [...] With this new state of emergency, surely, the limits of toleration have been reached even for its advocates. Given the current situation we demand that the Reichstag fraction immediately corrects its June 16 decision and, regardless of consequences, ask that the state of emergency with its masses-oppressing measures be done away with. Social Democracy has to militate that, instead of the state of emergency, measures be taken that restore social and political protection the toleration policy. Bury the illusion that this policy of toleration, of yielding and retreat, can spare the working class from the greater evil. Recognize that only the road of revolutionary struggle can open the proletariat the path to the elimination of the capitalist class society. [...] In the interest of the party and of the working class, we exhort the Reichstag fraction and the executive to turn a round, to abandon the toleration policy, to end its current course and to organize the battle for the liberation of the working class.[120]

The executive's reaction to this appeal was quick and severe. The party's press branded the message as the latest in a series of blows aiming to split the party: "This is nothing else than an attempt to organize an opposition inside the party, an attempt to create a party inside the existing one."[121] Even a number of collaborators to *Der Klassenkampf* distanced themselves from the appeal action. The SPD's executive requested immediate cessation of all activities deemed to promote a split in the party, specifically the publications in the *Roten Bücher der Marxistischen Büchergemeinde* collection and the launching of the bi-weekly *Der Fackel* (The Torch), which the KK-G was planning for in the weeks ahead.[122] Seydewitz and Rosenfeld, the leaders of the KK-G, refused the ultimatum while strongly denying that they sought to split the party. After this, the executive rejected further negotiations and, on September 29, 1931, excluded the two from the party.

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[120] KK 5 (1931), 385 , quoted in Seydewitz, *Es hat sich gelohnt*, 233-235
[121] Sozialdemokratische Parteikorrespondenz (1931), 515, quoted in Drechsler, 83
[122] Drechsler, 88-91

The Founding of the SAP

A few days later, on October 4, representatives of the Left Opposition gathered in Berlin to form the *Sozialistische Arbeiterpartei Deutschlands* (Socialist Workers' Party, SAPD or SAP). The founding of the party not only split the SPD, it also split the Left as a number of dedicated KK-G members, despite agreeing with the views of SAP's founders, thought that a new party would only weaken the socialist cause in Germany. Prominent among those who decided to remain with the SPD was Bieligk, who bemoaned the hypocritical charges the SPD executive levelled against the rebels. Similarly, Adler commented in *Der Klassenkampf*:

> Freedom of opinion—yes. Resistance to the ruling party policy—yes. But only as long as nothing is done to make this freedom of opinion and resistance effective. It's grotesque. . . One can see immediately that this attitude means nothing else than that freedom of opinion is permitted only as long as the prevailing view is not threatened.[123]

Many other Social Democrats not associated with the KK-G also condemned the undemocratic manner in which Rosenfeld and Sydewitz were driven out of the party. But, this denouement was probably inevitable. The SPD executive was determined to stifle the militancy of the Left. At the same time, Seydewitz and Rosenfeld had been warned by the marginalized Social Democratic youth groups that if they backed down with their criticism, the young would massively join the KPD.[124] Being expelled, rather than leaving the party at a time of their choosing, had to impact negatively on the chances of the new part becoming a mass organization. However, the beginning was fairly

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[123] quoted in Seydewitz, *Es hat sich gelohnt*, 240
[124] Drechsler, 108; Hunt 233

promising, as beside the majority of the KK-G, a large number of young Social Democrats and a score of Social Democrat and Communist sects also joined in the new party. The pacifist group *Deutsche Friedensgesellschaft* (German Peace Society, DFG), Georg Ledebour's *Sozialistische Bund* (Socialist Union), Theodor Liebknecht's USPD (the remains of the old USPD) and the *Internationale Sozialistische Kampfbund* (International Socialist Militant Union, ISK) joined the SAP almost immediately. The communist sect KPD-Opposition (KPO), led by Heinrich Brandler and August Thalhaimer and labeled as "right wing" by Moscow, joined in March 1932 and eventually took control over SAP.[125]

Among the many splinter groups that separated from the SPD and KPD, the SAP was now the largest. At the Berlin inaugural party convention there were present eighty-eight elected delegates representing twenty-five of thirty-three SPD districts, 127 guest-delegates and two hundered guests, mostly young socialists. With six elected deputies, the SAP also had an articulate presence in the Reichstag.[126] It looked like a good beginning as long as the party could grow steadily. To influence German politics, the SAP had to become a mass party, a task to which its leaders applied themselves immediately. Local newspapers were established, and presentations were organized throughout the country with the aim of familiarizing potential members with the views of the party and also to secure the financial basis necessary for the party to function.

The main task the party commited itself to was the creation of a united front of all

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[125] Drechsler, 137-154
[126] ibid., 106

socialist forces against Nazi aggression.[127] With many splinter groups dissatisfied with one aspect or another of the SPD or KPD policies, it seemed as if the time was ripe for such an undertaking. The united front policy was also, again, an indictment against the toleration course of the SPD. The SAP was proposing that all socialist forces, including the SPD and the KPD, unite against the fascist peril and plan to take control of the state power for the benefit of the proletariat. This strategy was advanced by the SAP as a "third way" to the SPD's choice between either a "Groener or a Hitler dictatorship."[128] In proposing an alliance with the communists, the SAP was answering an oath of a Social Democrat to "rather join a thousand times with Groener than once with the communists." To this, Rosenfeld wrote: "we have never understood such an utterance...we say today...rather one thousand times with the communists than even once with Groener."[129]

Initially, the SAP saw little difference between the authoritarian proclivities of Brüning and his backers, and Hitler. It characterised Brüning's authoritarianism as "cold fascism" and thought that a diagonal linked him through Groener, the chief of the army, to Hitler. By 1932, this erroneous view was corrected.

The SAP's view of fascism

The SAP, like all of the Left, defined fascism according to the Marxist class theory of a dichotomous social structure. In this schema, fascism was an extreme political direction that emerged when harsh economic and social conditions severely threatened the supremacy of the bourgeoisie. The explanation of the phenomenon was specifically

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[127] Drechsler, 158
[128] ibid., 175
[129] K. Rosenfeld. "Was toleriert wird?", in: Fackel, 16 Oct., 1931, quoted in Drechsler, 175

indebted to Marx's analysis of Bonapartism.[130] Using this model, Klaus Zweiling and Fritz Sternberg described fascism as a development that accompanies the severe economic crisis which foreshadows the decline of the capitalist system. Fascism serves the interests of big capital, but, as Mussolini (the former Marxist) and Trotsky had explained, "it is built on the backs of the petty bourgeoisie, which is used as a battering ram against the institutions of the proletariat."[131] The necessary conditions for fascist dictatorship aside from the economic crisis, included a proletariat not yet strong enough to overthrow capitalism and a bourgeoisie whose various strata could not agree over the methods to overcome the crisis. In these conditions, the bourgeoisie enables a "dictatorial adventurer" to assume total power:

> The transformation of the bourgeois state authority into an autonomous terrorist dictatorship is the only ruling method when the bourgeoisie is not capable of wielding political authority anymore, while the proletariat is not yet quite able to do it .[132]

Drechsler's contention[133] that at this point the SAP's theory of fascism was simplistic is wrong, probably unduly influenced by Abendroth's thesis discussed earlier, and to which most "Marburg school" members adhered. Klenke shows clearly that, in fact, the KK-G and later SAP recognized the great peril the Nazis posed to democracy and the labour movement immediately after the 1930 elections. In scores of articles and discussions, the Left Opposition pondered the suitability of and contradiction between various methods and fronts on which to fight the Nazis. The Left was fully aware that the attempt to

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[130] Drechsler, 229
[131] http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotski/works/1930-ger/330610.htp
[132] Zweiling/Sternberg, Programentwurf, Abschn.II/7-8; quoted in Drechsler, 230
[133] ibid., 230

restore legitimacy to Social Democracy through an oppositional policy opened the door for a possible Nazi accession to power, even if only in a coalition. The merits of the toleration policy were also weighed. The Left had no illusions that the fascists looked for total destruction of parliamentary democracy and of the labour movement. There were no advocates among the Left in favour of that the NSDAP should be allowed to compromise itself in power through mismanagement (*Abwirtschaftung*), as there were among the majority SPD. The SAP worked hard to prepare for parliamentary opposition to Nazism, to create a united front against them, to organize extra-parliamentary responses to Nazi aggression, be it mass demonstrations, a general strike or armed struggle.[134]

From the social point of view, the SAP posited, the mass basis of fascism was acquired from among the industrial middle class that was threatened with losing its status and being relegated to proletariat, from small-holding agrarians and declassé proletariat. Each of these strata were menaced in their existence by changes in the economy, specifically by the effects of monopolistic capitalism. Their gradual loss of middle-class identity made them susceptible to acting against their class interests through manipulation. The Nazis, master manipulators and demagogues, took advantage of these strata's need for an *Ersatz* identity, and by reviving traditional, deeply-rooted and ready-to-activate identification models, secured the latter's support.[135] The Nazis also took advantage of the volatility of the times and, by simplifying issues into dichotomous "friend-enemy" patterns, channelled long-festering frustrations and rallied the masses behind their aggressive rhetoric (as opposed to the rational Social Democratic

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[134] Klenke, 324-336
[135] ibid., 317

discourse).[136]

The first SAP party congress took place in March 1932 in Berlin and revealed that the party was unlikely to become a homogenous organization. The great variety of political persuasions that characterized the many groups included in the SAP could not easily come to an agreement. Communist-oriented factions like the Rück-Düby group agitated for joining the Comintern; former communist notables like Jakob Walcher and Paul Frölich steadily gained influence in the party; pacifists around Anna and August Siemsen were slowly marginalized; and, the core represented by Seydewitz and Rosenfeld were still the majority in the party but gradually losing control.[137]

By the time of the first party conference, the SAP had already begun to decline. The official party membership of 57,000 members was exaggerated by half.[138] In the federal elections of July 1932, the SAP received 72,630 votes or 0.2 per cent of the votes, and in November it fared worse, with 45,201 or 0.1 per cent.[139] By this time, the SAP had no more representatives in the Reichstag.

The SAP's sustained efforts to forge a united front against the Nazis had also come to a disappointing conclusion. After the installation of the ultra reactionary regime of Franz von Papen in June 1932, the SAP managed to organize a series of low-level united front actions against Nazi terror in Breslau, the Erzgebirge area, the Vogtland, and in Oberursel, where members of the SPD, SAP, KPD and the Iron Front demonstrated together. Unfortunately, despite the clear will of the rank and file of all these

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[136] ibid.316
[137] Drechsler, 248-251
[138] ibid., 251
[139] Hunt, 235

organizations to put away their differences and unite in struggle against fascism, their leaders discontinued further co-operation.[140]

The KPD was acting on Moscow's directives under the slogan "Social Democracy-the archenemy!" (*Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie*) according to the Comintern's theory of "social fascism." The latter held that Social Democracy, not National Socialism, was the main support of the bourgeoisie against the proletariat. This claim was still circulating even after Hitler had imposed his terror regime and had thrown thousands of communists in concentration camps. The KPD's so-called initiative of a "united front from below" was just a diversion to appease its restive membership, who wanted to fight the Nazis together with their Social Democrat brothers. The KPD was not acting in response to the realities of German politics but according to a Soviet agenda that disregarded the interests of the German proletariat. [141]

The SPD, on the other hand, was wary of the unpredictable actions of the KPD, not to mention its hostile alliances with the Nazis against the SPD government in Prussia in June 1932, or against the ADGB in the public transportation strike in November of the same year. The SPD set as a condition for further co-operation that the KPD cease any attacks on its leaders, but the communists had no intention to comply with that. The SPD still hoped to restore its political power through elections and parliamentary activity at the very moment when almost everybody else worked to do away with parliamentary democracy, from the president and Brüning to the DNVP, the Nazis and the KPD. Its executive was never comfortable with the existence of paramilitary units and armed

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[140] Drechsler, 260

[141] Hermann Weber. *Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie. Strategie und Taktik der KPD 1929-1933*, passim

struggle. The SPD of Wels and Hilferding was not prepared to deal with the dynamic and militaristic Nazis.

The SAP, then, had very little influence over the events of 1932-33. Not only was this party small and without resources, but the many ideological directions at work inside the party prevented it from becoming the democratic and militant beacon for Social Democrats its leaders hoped it would be. The SAP could also not be a mediator between the KPD and the SPD toward a united front. The KPD's hostility to leftist organizations was directly proportional to their left-radicalism; the closer a party was to the KPD, the harder it was attacked. Other socialist partieswere seen as competitors. *Die Rote Fahne* labeled the SAP as "Brüning's agents."[142] Ernst Thälmann, Stalin's loyal boss of the KPD, branded the SAP as the "the party of the centrist swamp."[143].Trotsky also viewed the SAP as centrist, but had the common sense not to question its dedication to socialism or its opposition to fascism.[144] The SPD, on the other hand, regarded the leaders of the SAP as apostates with ideas that were almost indistinguishable from Communism. There were serious misgivings among Social Democrats that the SAP had been infiltrated by the Comintern.

Alone and conflicted against the rising tide of anti-republicanism: German Social Democrats, 1929-1930

If the growing discord between the SPD executive and the Left Opposition had become an open conflict by 1930, the relationship between the party and certain sections

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[142] quoted in Drechsler, 136
[143] ibid.
[144] L. Trotski. *Fascism, Stalinism and the United Front* (London: Bookmarks, 1989), passim

of the rank and file was also fraught with tension. Now, I would like to change focus and examine the thoughts and attitudes of the SPD rank and file during the chaotic 1929-1930 period. I will concentrate on the disputes surrounding four important Weimar social groups: youth, women, intellectuals and white-collar employees, and rural proletariat. These groups were very important for the SPD, as they were meant to insure the renewal of the party and its transition from a class party to a people's party. The SPD's failure to rally most of the members of these groups behind its policies led, aside from its setbacks in elections, to a marked loss in its political vigour. How did these groups view the SPD in the 1929-1930 period? What were the problems that prevented them from supporting the party in large numbers? Were some of their concerns similar to those that divorced the Left from the main body of the party? I will try to answer these questions by doing a close reading of letters on these topics sent by the rank and file to *Das Freie Wort*, a weekly that the SPD had dedicated to the uncensored publishing of ordinary Social Democrats' suggestions, opinions and criticism on the activity of their party and on political developments in Germany. For the 1929-1930 period was a time of tumultuous changes in the life of the young German republic. A number of important events occurred, and processes were set in motion that weakened the democratic system in Germany to such a degree that, despite honest effort, renewed attacks and setbacks in 1932 led to the collapse of the republic and the onset of the Nazi dictatorship in January 1933.

Internally, a series of negative political developments handicapped the effectiveness of the Great Coalition government led by the SPD. In late 1928, both the DNVP and the Centre party elected leaders that did not support the democratic republic.

Alfred Hugenberg, the newly-elected leader of the DNVP, put an end to any cooperation inside the Great Coalition, with the intent to bring the republic down. He played a significant role in Hitler's rapid rise to political prominence at the end of the 1920s, both as the head of the party that would forge a political alliance with the Nazis (the so-called "national opposition"), and as a financial backer.

At the same time (December, 1928), the Centre party elected prelate Ludwig Kaas as its new leader.[145] Kaas assumed leadership with a mandate to reunite a party that had shown signs of serious dissensions after the setbacks suffered in the 1928 elections. His election was an attempt to establish clerical leadership over the party at a time when large numbers of Catholic workers urged their party to adopt a more socialist agenda, while others had already voted for the SPD.[146] But, while totally capable of reasserting Catholicism as the ideological core of the party, Kaas was ill suited to lead a party that was also a pillar of the Weimar Coalition. He was not a supporter of parliamentary democracy, but an advocate of authoritarian "*Führerdemokratie*"[147]—a position consistent with the Centre party's historic conservatism. This attribute had been recently embraced anew, particularly by the young Catholics, under the spell of Moeller van den Bruck's book *Das Dritte Reich* [148], which extolled a specifically German version of an authoritarian social order that would save Europe from its ills through, again, a peculiar

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[145] Among the most important works on the Centre Party Weimar history are: R. Morsey, *Die Deutsche Zentrumspartei 1917-1923*, (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1966); *Der Untergang des Politischen Katholizismus*, (Sturrgart/Zürich 1977); K. Ruppert, *Im Dienst am Stat von Weimar. Das Zentrum als regierende Partei in der Weimarer Demokratie 1923-1930*, (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1992); H. Hömig, *Das preußische Zentrum in der Weimarer Republik*, (Mainz: Gruenewald, 1979)

[146] Grebing. *Geschichte der Deutschen Parteien*, 104-105

[147] Kolb. *Die Weimarer Republik*, (Muenchen: Oldenbourg, 1993), 85

[148] Neumann, 48

non-Marxist, anti-liberal, German brand of socialism.[149]

This turn of the Centre party to the right, coupled with the vertiginous decline of the DDP, weakened the Weimar Coalition immensely and isolated the SPD. The development not only subverted republicanism but made coalition government notoriously ineffective. The death of Gustav Stresemann in October 1929 dealt another severe blow to the republic. The great man of German foreign policy, whose persistent and intelligent work had restored much of Germany's international respectability, had been, after a reluctant beginning, a solid supporter of the republic. He almost single-handedly forced the conservative DVP into the Great Coalition. His efforts allowed the government to function and to maintain the consensus necessary for the successful negotiation and signing of the Young Plan and reap more rewards at the Hague Conference. After his death, the DVP turned right, worked against the coalition and fell into insignificance with most of its constituency going over to the DNVP.[150]

At the extreme left of the Weimar political spectrum, the KPD had undergone transformations that radically changed its relationship with the SPD. In the 1928 federal elections, the KPD had enjoyed much success, especially in large industrial areas, and it became a major political force. Just as important, in 1927, the Comintern had proclaimed the start of the 'third period', or 'disintegration period' of the capitalist system. In these conditions, the theory went, any cooperation between the revolutionary KPD and the reformist SPD or its affiliated trade unions was not only inappropriate but a betrayal of

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[149] Hans Kohn. *The Mind of Germany* (New York: Harper, 1965), 331-332

[150] Notable works on Stresemann's life and career are: A. Thimme, *Gustav Stresemann* (Luebeck: Matthiesen, 1961), H.A. Turner, *Stresemann. Republikaner aus Vernunft* (Berlin, 1968); K. Koszik, *Gustav Stresemann. Der kaisertreue Demokrat* (Köln, 1989)

the working class.[151] According to Stalin's theoretical pronouncements, the SPD was branded as the party of "social fascists", a party more dangerous to the proletariat than the Nazi Party, a line that that KPD adhered to even after January 1933.[152] The KPD had its own reasons to support this policy, as rapprochement with the SPD threatened its own existence. Soviet reasons for vilification of the SPD were just as pragmatic. Stalin regarded the developments in German foreign policy as most threatening to the Soviet Union. The effects of the Young Plan and the general improvement of Germany's relationships with its former Western enemies meant conversely a cooling of the Berlin-Moscow romance started at Rapallo in 1922 and a weakening of the Soviet position versus its capitalist nemeses.[153] Thus, a possible united front between the SPD and the KPD against the Nazi assault was scrapped in order to defend Soviet interests, even as many German communists opposed this course. Probably no other single political development contributed more to clearing the Nazis' path to power.

At the extreme right, the NSDAP managed to survive defeat in the 1928 elections (it gained only seven seats in the Reichstag), even increasing and solidifying its membership, becoming a party of cadre.[154] During 1929, the NSDAP opportunistically used the signing of the Young Plan and the onset of the economic crisis to gain political prominence. The party joined the DNVP and the nationalist veterans' organisation *Stahlhelm* in a committee agitating for a national referendum against the Young Plan. The referendum called for the adoption of a special law "against the Enslavement of the

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[151] C. Fischer. *The German Communists and the Rise of Nazism*, 102
[152] H. Weber. *Hauptfeind Sozialdemokratie*, passim; H.A. Winkler.*Der Weg in die Katastrophe*, 13
[153] C. Fischer, 105
[154] Kolb, 115

German People" (*Gesetz gegen die Versklavung des deutschen Volkes*). The draft demanded the abrogation of all stipulations in the Young agreement (a new, longer payment plan but reduced annuities towards reparations, earlier withdrawal of Allied troops from Germany, etc.), the expurgation of any reference to Germany's "war-guilt" and, more radically, for the prosecution of all politicians who would not comply with the letter of this 'law' as traitors. [155] The referendum failed, but in the process the DNVP lost support and was reduced to minor significance in the Reichstag (seventy-three seats in 1928 versus thirty-seven in 1932). The NSDAP, however, profited considerably from the exposure it received as a member of the National Committee for the German Referendum. The Nazis used Hugenberg's money and press empire, put at their disposal for the duration of the referendum campaign, to raise their political profile considerably. They made effective use of these resources to test their emotional, demagogic propaganda and put on repeated shows of force that culminated with the militaristic spectacle of the party's Nürnberg conference, where 20,000 uniformed SA men paraded before Hitler.[156] Indeed, Hitler manipulated the campaign for the National Referendum and cast the NSDAP "as the major driving force of nationalist politics."[157]

The fruits of this policy were immediate as the NSDAP registered successes in provincial elections in Baden and Thuringia, in large part at the expense of the DNVP. Then, in the November 1929 communal elections, the Nazis did exceedingly well against their conservative rivals but also at the expense of the SPD. The Social Democrats took

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[155] H. Mommsen. *The Rise and Fall of the Weimar Democracy* (London: U of North Carolina Press, 1969), 278-279; Kolb, 116

[156] Kolb, 117

[157] Mommsen, 281

note, and the debate on how to stop the Nazis acquired a sense of urgency.

The 1924-28 period of relative stability weakened considerably the parties of the right. The contention that the "pro-republican parties were always under pressure from the radical parties of the right and the left"[158] could easily be turned around when one compares the number of seats in parliament the respective parties gained or lost between the first election of 1924 and that of 1928. The DNVP went from 95 to 73 seats, the NSDAP from 32 to 12, and the KPD from 62 to 54 seats. Meanwhile, the DDP went from 28 to 25 seats, the Centre party from 65 to 62, while the SPD surged tremendously from 100 to 153 seats.[159] The SPD had garnered thirty percent of the votes and looked poised to reacquire the dominant position in the *Reichstag* it enjoyed in 1919.

As Robert Michels had predicted, with success at the polls, the socialist organization would drift away from revolutionary programs and, consistent with a liberal-democratic political culture, pour its resources into becoming a highly efficient electoral machine. To its leadership, it seemed evident that the SPD had the necessary political power to shape state policies for the benefit of the proletariat. Hilferding's theory of "organized capitalism" also suggested that even the enemies of the proletariat, the great capitalist corporations, could not make their profits without working out a mutually profitable *modus vivendi* with organized labour. It appeared that no modern capitalist economic system could function without the support and control of the state, a crucial aspect that pointed to the advent of the socialist economy. Hilferding's thesis served as an added argument in favour of maintaining the reformist course advocated by the SPD

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[158] Peukert, 209
[159] Figures from Kolb, 282-83

executive. The economic and political development outlined above, coupled with the political supremacy the SPD seemed destined to reach, encouraged predictions of a German socialist state in a not too distant future without the tragedy of a civil war.

This thesis, however, excluded the possibility of grave economic crises. In 1929, Germany was already experiencing a mild recession with unemployment varying between 1.35 and 1.9 million unemployed. The onset of the Great Economic Crisis in October 1929 severely worsened the situation. By February 1930, there were 3.05 million jobless people in the country.[160] Germany was hit by the depression worse than any other country, with the possible exception of the United States, but the political consequences were more far-reaching in Germany than in America. The Great Depression created conditions that benefited the extremist parties, the KPD and, particularly, the NSDAP. In the difficult conditions of the economic crisis, it became evident that the political immobilism of the SPD, its defensive stand throughout the short life of the republic, was an inadequate strategy for the times. The SPD had not used its political potential, so clearly evident in 1919, to become a dominant *Volkspartei* (people's party). On the eve of the depression, there was a large mass of first-time and undecided voters, who, if convinced to vote for the SPD, would have solidified democracy and saved the republic. The top competitors for these votes were the NSDAP and the KPD. The SPD's internal problems, which made its growth as a party problematic, as well as the methods and the propaganda it used to woo new voters, became vital for the Social Democrat rank-and-file after 1929. As one response, in October 1929, the SPD founded the weekly periodical

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[160] *Die Weimarer Republik*, Bracher, Funke & Jacobsen eds., (Duesseldorf: Droste, 1987), 637

Das Freie Wort ("the free word") for the purpose of open debate and critical discussion of all matters important to the party. As we shall see, rank-and-file Social Democrats felt deeply about how their party continued to develop. A central debate at this time was the problematic political mobilization and integration of a number of special groups: youth, women, white-collar workers and civil servants, and the rural proletariat. As the 1929 local and the 1930 federal elections were to show, the SPD experienced increasing difficulty securing the support of these groups. The failure of the SPD to become a "people's party" at a time when social fragmentation and suspicion was reaching new heights, opened the door for the rapidly surging Nazi Party.

The November 17, 1929 issue of *Das Freie Wort* (issue no. 7) discussed numerous pressing concerns. In the main editorial, its chief editor, Ernst Heilmann announced that, beginning with this issue, the publication was to be exclusively dedicated to the "*free* discussion of the pending inner-party and other general political problems."[161] The first six issues had been dedicated to SPD's electoral campaign for the communal elections taking place in November.

The elections' results and the Hugenberg Referendum that was conducted at the same time were seen as indicators of the SPD's organizational development and preparedness to face massive challenges to the democratic republican system, whose main guarantor was the SPD. Thus, Heilmann had to admit that a large number of signatures for the referendum in the SPD strongholds of Vogtland, Chemnitz and Plauen confirmed the earlier Nazi success in the Baden regional elections. However, he

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[161] DFW, no.7, 17.11.1929, 1

flippantly added, there was no reason to worry ("*darin liegt keinerlei Grund zur Nervosität*") as "anti-Semitism in Germany had gradually diminished and suddenly collapsed."[162] Such inconsistent and casual treatment of the Nazi threat was hardly the norm among Social Democrats. Heilmann went on to assure readers that thorough work and organization would win the day. Lucid knowledge of facts and clear political insight were going to prevail against Nazi and Communist "phrases...and the constant invective and haranguing" (*Geschimpfe und Gebrülle).*[163]

The KPD also had registered success in the elections, particularly in Berlin where it made record gains, Heilmann duly noted. The Communists had used the Sklarek scandal (a case of corruption in the Berlin municipal administration), to target everybody, but especially the SPD, despite the fact that some communist officials were also involved. The level of invective against the SPD in the KPD press had reached unprecedented levels. In the November 10 edition of the *Rote Fahne* an article that made the SPD responsible for World War I ended like this: "The true robbers, the true swindlers, rogues, cheaters, liers and murderers—that is the Socialist party, its highest leaders, such is its executive. At the top of German Social Democracy stands the dirtiest rabble that capitalism could have bought for themselves." [164]

Heilmann presented this excerpt as an example of the lows to which German political contests had sunk in the previous ten years. The Nazis and the Communists were the main culprits for the lack of civility or "reason and decency" (*Vernunft und Anstand)* in political agitation, the very criteria the SPD was using to tailor its own political

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[162] ibid.
[163] ibid., 2
[164] ibid.

propaganda. It was befuddling for the Social Democrats to have to admit that rational argument had no chance against demagogic phrasemongering. All Heilmann, for instance, could recommend to this change of rules in political debate was to sever all ties and all negotiations with the Communists as a question of honour, as being below the dignity of a Social Democrat: "in the future there can be no negotiation, no agreement with the Communists, it can never occur that a parliamentary majority be realised through a pact between the Social Democrats and the Communists. . . An insurmountable wall has to be erected between us and those disgusting calumniators and slanderers."[165]

Heilmann ended his editorial by discussing the pending financial reform that the hard present required, the difficulty of coming to an agreement on tax changes with the four other parties in the Great Coalition, the many volatile factors that influenced German politics such as the (still to be adopted) Young Plan, the final terms of the concluding conference scheduled for January 1930 in the Hague, and the trial and tribulations of Social Democratic parties in neighbouring countries.

Such an editorial was typical for *Das Freie Wort*. Its purpose was to introduce topics of interest to the SPD members for discussion. Most of these editorials were written by Heilmann from a fairly predictable position; he was a long-standing member of the party elite, the leader of the SPD deputies' fraction in the Prussian *Landtag*, and a staunch supporter of the executive line. But that did not mean that dissenting opinions were banned from the publication. Many articles questioned, or even criticised leadership's decisions and policies. Hundreds of letters from the rank and file expressed

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[165] ibid., 3

dissatisfaction (and, of course, also support for) with a wide range of party practices. There is no question that the SPD was a democratic organisation; voicing one's opinion, even if critical of the party brass, was not discouraged. But it would be naïve to assume that the party's leadership would refuse to control its press when criticism was drowning out its rank-and-file support. On occasion, Heilmann would stop publishing letters on issues he considered to have been discussed "too much".

The average reader of the DFW was fairly well educated about the issues discussed and not short on opinion. The topics were generally introduced in articles written by trained journalists manifesting varying degrees of support for the official line. In the same edition of the periodical already discussed, Hans Marckwald wrote about the ambivalent position Social Democrats had towards coalitions; Konrad Ludwig criticized the SPD's poor record of promoting women to positions of authority; Heinz Krüger urged the party in moderate tones to involve youth more in important decision making; Richard Hauschildt dismissed reports about a purported gerontocracy dominating the party apparatus as inaccurate; Otto Meinecke warned that insufficient SPD propaganda in the countryside made it easy for Hugenberg to gather signatures from agricultural workers for his referendum; finally, district judge Marx from Heidelberg urged the party to clarify its position towards intellectuals as a condition of it becoming a party of social integration at a time when the workers' votes were split more than ever[166], and one quarter to one third

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[166] DFW, nr.7,1929. H. Markwald, "Der Kern im Koalitionstreit", 4-10; K. Ludwig, "Gegen die Holzklötze", 10-13; H. Krüger, "Freies Wort der Jugend!", 13-16; R. Hauschild, "Ist der Parteikörper überalted?", 16-19; O. Meinecke, "Mahnruf vom Lande", 19-21; Amtsgr. Marx, "Das Verhältnis der Partei zu den Intellektuellen", 21-26

of SPD's votes were believed to come from white-collar employees and civil servants.[167]

Many of these issues were long-standing questions for the SPD, but clear positions tended to gel at election time, as losing workers' votes in Saxony or Berlin or not attracting nearly enough of the women's votes were immediately perceived as policy failures, and followed by demands for immediate change. On the other hand, there was a significant segment in the party who tended to downplay setbacks, promote the status quo and often manifest puzzling optimism in the face of regress.

The communal elections of 1929 and the 1930 federal elections provided excellent examples of such reactions. The SPD did not lose many votes in these elections compared to the preceding ones, but relative to the large Nazi and KPD successes, the results were a disappointment. It was clear that the SPD had failed to convince the sizable mass of undecided and young first-time voters to give it their ballots. Despite this, the prevailing initial reaction in DFW was positive. W. Krüger wrote about success in Prussia, the "gratifying progress of Social Democracy" and the "modest" gain of the Communists, and of the strong Nazi showing at the expense of the DNVP.[168] Similarly, H. Eberle of Görlitz announced "victory over political hooliganism" as both the KPD and the NSDAP had not registered results commensurate with the pre-election agitation. In Halle-Merseburg, "the communist front was broken", proclaimed Fr. Peters, while in Leipzig, E. Frenzel talked about a "communist catastrophe." In a side note, he admitted that the "communist apostates" probably voted for the NSDAP as the SPD had only gained one seat relative to previous elections. O. Steiner from Chemnitz described SPD

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[167] Harsch, 29
[168] DFW, 1.12.1929, 7-8

results in his area as an "unstoppable march forward", although not all results were in yet.[169] There were a dozen similar accounts in this December issue of the DFW.[170] There are enough indications in the same articles that not all was well. In a grudging but sober concluding assessment, Heilmann had to concede that there were some gains but overall the results were negative. Compared to the 1928 federal elections, the SPD had lost votes in all provinces with the exception of Pommerania. The losses were severe in Berlin, Westphalia and Rhineland. Astonishingly, the NSDAP votes surged by 160 percent. He blamed the setback on the Sklarek scandal, on the ineffectiveness of Social Democratic propaganda that had worked so well between 1924 and 1928, and on the fact that the successes at the Hague Conference and of the Young Plan were slow to produce political capital.[171]

A different perspective came from Georg Decker, a well-known Social Democrat publicist and theorist. He called the defeat in Berlin "a deserved...slap in the face." The rank and file had done a good job in preparation for the election, Decker wrote, only to have it all go for nought because the party had mishandled the Sklarek scandal and opened itself to slander from the Communists and the bourgeois parties. The Berlin party organisation's failure was three-fold: "first, a flawed personnel policy; second, an inadequate control over the behaviour of its men in important positions; third, political breakdown once the scandal had erupted." It was an indication that "something in the Berlin party apparatus was not functioning right, and...that the whole party structure had to be inspected thoroughly." Decker demanded that, according to its democratic

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[169] ibid.
[170] ibid., 7-30
[171] ibid., 31-32

principles, the leadership of the Berlin organization be judged by its constituents and suffer the consequences of its failures, "whatever the verdict of the party folk may be after such a heavy defeat."[172]

Heilmann used his editorial privileges to respond to Decker's criticism. The organization had behaved faultlessly. There was nothing to impugn the leaders, and it was impossible to control every act of every Social Democrat in a position of trust. The defeat in Berlin was not owed to organizational failure but to the joined onslaught of Communist and bourgeois press. Decker's letter was welcome, if only to clear the air ("as very many comrades in Berlin may think the same"), but that did not change the fact that he was wrong.[173]

The SPD had also suffered a bitter defeat in Breslau, the other large city in eastern Germany. Helene Thomas reported that six SPD city aldermen lost their seats when the party received 20,391 fewer votes than in the 1928 elections. It was revealed that the shortfall resulted from a drop in turnout of 17,298 voters, the majority of which were apparently workers. But what could have kept the highly politicized Social Democratic workers from supporting their party? Thomas suggested that there was strife going on in the local organization since a change of guard that saw "experienced workers of the local organization replaced with neophytes (*Neulinge*)." The mood among the workers, Thomas continues, was well described by the statement of one anonymous (!) party member: "as long as the Young Socialists (*Jungsozialisten*) have the upper hand in the local organization, I will not vote...We (?) would rather accept a defeat than make the

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[172] ibid., "Die Schuld an der Berliner Niederlage", 4-5
[173] ibid., 5-6

whole party the butt of bourgeois jokes." It was implied here that the young socialists were behaving unprofessionally and compromising the SPD. These were strong words that pointed to a serious crisis in Breslau. Thomas explains that, in Breslau, the Young Socialists were not like elsewhere, "temperamental hotheads, but...only comrades who fancy themselves as particularly radical, and whose radicalism materializes into an ugly, inner-party conflict." These Young Socialists were led by an unnamed lawyer, and they had managed to replaced most of the "proven" candidates with new ones.[174]

We recognize the lawyer as Dr. Ernst Eckstein, known in Breslau as "the lawyer of the poor", a leader of the Left Opposition and a co-founder of SAP less than two years later. The Left was very strong in Breslau, as were the Young Socialists, a long-time ally of the KKG. The SPD executive had for years been suspicious of the radicalism of Social Democratic youth organizations and ensured that only youth leaders that toed the party line got promoted. At the 1931 party conference in Leipzig, the SPD dismantled all independent Social Democratic youth organizations without allowing any representatives of the Young Socialists, or of other youth bodies, to contest the measure.[175]

"Republik, das ist nicht viel"[176]— German youth and the SPD, 1929-1930

The conflict in the Breslau organization reveals two of the most contentious issues the party had to confront: the Left Opposition and the youth movement. The SPD never quite managed to make itself attractive to a large section of the German youth. The reserve and

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[174] DFW, 15.12.1929, "*Die verlorene Breslauer Wahlschlacht*", 30-31
[175] Drechsler, 74-75
[176] DFW, 31.08.1930. K. Heinig, *"Wahlaufgaben und Wahlprobleme"*, 4-10

condescension junior members (females even more so than males) had to contend with were vividly rendered by a young woman, who complained that, in meetings, she was dismissed "before she could open her mouth" with the patronizing "*Na Frollein* [sic], *Se sin* [sic] *wohl noch sehr jung.*"[177] The party's rationalism and "prosaic reformism"[178] did not appeal to many of the young. The relatively late creation of a youth section (legally impossible before 1908), and the strict control it had to operate under discouraged the young from joining in. Thus, from a high of 100,000 members in 1913, the Socialist Workers' Youth (SAJ) declined continuously during Weimar, and never counted more than 56,000 members.[179]

SAJ reached this figure in 1930 at the end of a campaign to retain its members and attract new ones as it became increasingly clear that the KPD and the NSDAP exerted considerable pull with the frustrated and restive German youth. Social Democratic youth needed more than cultural and sport organizations to expend its energy; it clamoured for more input in the decisions of the party and demanded the backing of the party in its attempts to reclaim the city streets from the KPD and NSDAP rowdies.

The SPD did attempt to strike a balance between its prerogative to control its youth organizations and the need for independence and relevance expressed by its younger members; however, it stressed patience and restraint in political struggle. Some adult SPD members tried to intercede on behalf of the youth. In an article already mentioned, Heinz Krüger intimated that there existed a conflict between the patient,

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[177] "Now, miss, you're still so very young", DFW, 24.11.1929, 29
[178] Hunt, 107
[179] ibid., 108-110

methodical work for reform of the "old guard" and the driven push to achieve socialism of the young Social Democrats: "they want to take the faster and straighter road to the goal, rather than the one favoured by the older leaders in the party and the trade unions." This drive, Krüger urged, should find "wide understanding among the senior members of the labour movement, and...should not be braked by the leaders but allowed to turn into more lively participation and positive activity of the socialist youth in the political life of the present." The youth was grateful for the accomplishments of the older comrades, but it had to be allowed to bring its own contribution by "having more of its representatives in the leadership of the party", and be given "more room to be active inside the movement in order to be contribute to the cause."[180]

In the next issue, Herta Gotthelf reprised the topic while also answering Hauschild's defensive claim that the party was not really that old (*"Ist der Parteikörper überaltert?"*). She saw a problem not so much with the numbers of young party members involved in the leadership but "with the general attitude towards giving important work to young members", for it had to be said "without exaggeration that wherever the young want to contribute, in most cases, it is met with mistrust and rejection." Obviously, a young member of the SAJ, Gotthelf reminded the adults in charge of the party that the socialist youth "was not fighting against the deserving old comrades who in the early history of the movement had been called to do important work, and despite their youth, or rather because of it, they had accomplished much for the movement." Gotthelf was clearly frustrated that "too few comrades promote or include the young in important

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[180] loc.cit., 14-16

work, while in most places they have to fight for recognition as equal contributors."[181]

This exchange did not escalate into a larger dispute and the issue was put on a back burner. The pragmatic attitude of the SPD dictated that a group which accounted for only five percent of its organization was not going to get much attention. On the other hand, the radical tendencies inside the Young Socialists and the SAJ were perceived as menacing to the executive; therefore the party used its apparatus efficiently and often to weaken rather than to strengthen the youth movement. This policy, according to Bieligk, was threatening to "chase out of the Social Democratic movement even that small section of the proletarian youth that was still standing by its side."[182]

A sustained effort to attract the youth was only attempted just before the federal elections scheduled for September 1930. Gustav Weber, an SPD activist from Berlin, estimated the chances of the SPD to attract the votes of young Germans as very good. Notwithstanding the massive exertions of the NSDAP, of the KPD and of the Center party, the SPD, history showed, would garner most of the youth vote. The consensus was that the bourgeois parties' losses in the 1928 elections were due to their loss of the youth vote and the outlook was even worse now. Despite the fact that "the young voters were the most unpredictable group of the electorate", and liable to be impressed —"when intellectually uninterested"— by "loud shouting and attractive slogans", there was good reason to believe that most youth would vote SPD. Weber was convinced that for most young workers, the three month rule of Brüning's bourgeois coalition was enough to convince them that only the SPD was looking after their interests. In addition, the party

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[181] DFW, 24.11.1929, 29 "*Der Parteinachwuchs*"
[182] F. Bieligk. "*Die Organisation wie sie ist*" in Die Organisation im Klassenkampf, 61-62

was "making efforts to rejuvenate its Reichstag delegation"; it had not yet done so, but was planning on it.[183]

These were belated attempts to improve on a situation that did not warrant much optimism in the outcome of the looming elections. Very little had been done between the local elections in November of the previous year and the summer of 1930 to attract more young recruits to the SPD banner, or even to hold on to those who had supported it. This became more evident after the fall of the Müller government, when, with an impending election clearly on the horizon, it seemed that there were not enough (motivated) young Social Democrats around to do the strenuous work of door-to-door agitation necessary in order to reverse the trend started in 1929. It was symptomatic that in the Social Democrat stronghold of Zwickau, in "red" Saxony, the vast majority of non-voters, according to correspondent Robert Müller from Reichenbach in Vogtland, were members of the working class.[184] He attributed that to insufficient house-to-house agitation before and on election day, to which "young men and women comrades should bring more zeal (*Arbeitslust)* and perseverance."[185]

But in Saxony, like in the rest of the country, the SPD was losing supporters, particularly among the young. In the same issue of the DFW, Rudolf Hörkster, "railway worker and town alderman", declared that "the great success of the National Socialists registered at the expense of the bourgeois parties affected us [the SPD] also; because they stopped our growth and won to themselves a considerable section of the youth."[186]

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[183] DFW, 24.08.1930. "*Sozialdemokratie, junge Generation und Reichstagswahl*", 9-14
[184] DFW, 15.05.1930, "*Die Nichtwähler*", 26
[185] ibid.
[186] ibid., "*Ein Appell an die Reichstagfraktion*", 27-28

The recent success of the NSDAP among the young was largely attributed to its unprincipled propaganda. It was widely recognized among Social Democrats that the youth answered positively to passionate, incendiary rhetoric. The SPD, however, believed that the only honest and effective way to deal with the demagogic propaganda of the NSDAP and of the KPD was lucid, rational education. It is clear that in the Social Democratic conception of political discourse, passion and reason were mutually exclusive. Typical for this point of view was the exhortation of Otto Kaletsch from Salzböden in the district of Wetzlar to his party comrades to instruct and enlighten the young (*Aufklärung , Aufklärung, und nochmals Aufklärung*) with "truth, economic insight and political experience against the phrase spinners." This was necessary because "everywhere, in factories, union halls, even party meetings, one could encounter colleagues who are intoxicated (*angehaucht*) with the insane phrase-mongering of the terrorists." It was very unsettling that "demagogues from right and left were attempting to swindle people into changing their political convictions with irresponsible promises and lurid bait, and that young people or even older politically unenlightened persons fall victim to this rubbish."[187]

The SPD's preoccupation with finding an effective propagandistic response to the Nazi and Communist aggressive pursuit of the youth vote was spurred in the summer of 1930 by an unprecedented sense of urgency. When the Reichstag was dissolved in July, and elections were called for September, it had become clear that the voters were going to decide not merely on the political composition of the parliament, but on whether

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[187] DFW, 6.4.1930, *"Klärt die Jugend auf!"*, 26-27

Germany was to remain a democracy or opt for authoritarianism. Social Democrats were keenly aware that the new re-alignment of the political forces in the country was directed not just against Social Democracy but against democracy and republicanism.[188] Holding on to its base while also convincing most of the roughly three million men and women between the ages of twenty to twenty-five (1.2 million first-time voters)[189] to cast their ballot for the SPD was a daunting task.

Among Social Democrats the assessment of the SPD's attractiveness to German youth swung between shallow and self-delusional to sober and realistic. Erich Meyer from Hagen (Westphalia), for instance, thought that the situation was extremely favourable for the SPD on the eve of the elections. All that was necessary for a positive outcome was

> good work in studying the regrouping process of the electorate...and the structural changes in the economy in order to understand their effects on various population strata. The shifting of forces in the bourgeois camp is a sociological process,...therefore, despite all the Teutonic Order-like romantic claptrap of the bourgeois youth, it can be sociologically established that, for instance, there is no coming together between the State Party... and...the DVP.[190]

The same kind of sociological insight secured an advantage for the SPD as it competed for the youth vote with the KPD and the NSDAP, whose "work was based strongly on feel" (*stark gefühlsmäßig arbeiten*). Meyer thought that the KPD youth could be convinced quite easily to vote for the SPD. His assessment proved wrong.

How formulaic and abstract the SPD's view of the German youth often was is summed up in Berliner Friedrich Ege's proclamations that "today's youth wants to know

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[188] DFW, 24.08.1930. S. Aufhäuser, "*Demokratie, der Arbeit Waffe—der Bürger Schreck*, 6-9; DFW, 31.08. 1930. E. Heilmann, "*Die Tatsachen*", 1-4
[189] DFW, 24.08.1930.G. Weber, op.cit.
[190] ibid., "*Werbewoche für die Jungwähler*", 14-16

where the road leads... ; the youth wants clarity and truth (*Klarheit und Wahrheit).*[191]

Gustav Weber, in an article already mentioned[192], at least conceded that the Weimar youth was unpredictable in its political choices. He admitted that many young Germans voted for the SPD, the KPD and the NSDAP not because they understood and supported their political platforms but as a protest against the political and economic situation in the country. While recognizing that the youth had radicalized lately, he still believed that the SPD was an inviting political home for the restive younger generation. If the party made clear that it was sympathetic to the social and cultural needs of the young, success was probable. He gave the results of the 1928 general elections as evidence that the SPD could attract the young voters' ballots away from the bourgeois parties: "from all the evidence, one can draw the conclusion—although nothing is for certain—that today, as then (1928), the young voters will in their majority vote for the Social Democrats."[193] He did not recognize how different the situation was in the fall of 1930.

Kurt Heinig delivered a much more realistic and penetrating analysis of the political conundrums in relation to young voterson the eve of the 1930 elections.[194] As opposed to Weber, he recognized how different the situation in 1930 was from 1928. The rapid desintegration of the political middle and of the DNVP created a large number of "political homeless" (*"politische Heimatlose"*), in fact millions of voters, in search of political representation. The SPD was in a bitter battle with the NSDAP, the KPD and the

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[191] DFW, 24.09.1931. *"Wir wollen die Jugend führen - aber wohin?"*, 16-18
[192] DFW, 24.08.1931, 9-14
[193] ibid., 11
[194] DFW, 31.08.1931. *"Wahlaufgaben und Wahlprobleme"*, 4-10

Center party for these voters. Many of these voters were young; they did not remember the Germany prior to the November Revolution. Consequently, the SPD could not win this sizable group over by reminding them that the the social rights they enjoyed now were owed in large part to the Social Democrats: " the young generation does not compare the past with the present, . . . for [part of] the youth the Republic is not much of an accomplishment" (*Republik, das ist nicht viel*). For Heinig, the key to winning the youth over for the long haul was to reveal to them their connection to the past and thereby include them in the progressive tradition of the SPD. If that failed, the youth would vote "the wrong way". Heinig was quite aware of how crucial these elections were for the future of Germany:

> If the old generation is incapable of teaching the young to carry on in the building of the new society, then the new generation will tear down and throw away that which it had inherited in the belief that it will be easier to shape the future by starting from scratch.[195]

Heinig was quite right; the generation that won the political battle at the end of Weimar did indeed tear down the republican 'building' and started from scratch only to take Germany into the most brutal phase of its history. This was made possible, among other factors, by the inability of the SPD to convince the young and the undecided, in 1930 and later, that it could lead Germany out of its political and economic morass.

From the point of view of the young Social Democrats, the situation in the movement was clearly disheartening. In a letter published after the elections, but written just prior to it, Kurt Krausbeck, a young SAJ leader from Baden-Baden, admitted flat out

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[195] ibid., 9

that "despite support from the party leaders" there was no Social Democratic political youth movement in the city. In a resigned tone, Krausbeck suggested that one of the causes for this sad state of affairs was that older SPD members could (and would) not convince their offspring to join the SAJ.[196] Otto Kaletsch, from Wetzlar, considered this a shameful reality that affected the whole country and explained why the SAJ remained a small organization.[197] But this was only a secondary reason for the irrelevance of the SAJ; neither writer felt confident (or comfortable) enough to explain why, in many Social Democrat associations such as the one in Baden-Baden, "the issue was not so much that the youths could not assert themselves, but that there were no youths to talk about" (*überhaupt keine Jungen da sind*).[198]

After the disastrous elections of September 1930, the gloves came off on both sides of the dispute. The SPD executive cracked down on all rebellious tendencies. The aggressive, independent attitude of the *Jungsozialisten* was criticised as divisive and unacceptable.[199] The young were again reminded that important positions in the party could only be entrusted to those who possessed "knowledge, know-how, experience and energy."[200] In November, the Berlin Social Democratic organization dissolved the local *Jungsozialisten* chapter and in May of the following year, the SPD party conference in Leipzig declared the country-wide dissolution of this youth organization. Speaking on behalf of the party, Kurt Zingelmann, a recanting leader of the Young Socialists,

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[196] DFW, 21.09.1930, "*Die Aktivierung der Jungen*", 28-29
[197] DFW, 6.04.1930, 27. "*Wie versündigen sich die älteren Parteigenossen an der Partei, die ihre Kinder in die bügerlichen Vereine schicken*".
[198] DFW, 21.09.1930, 29
[199] DFW, 21.09.1930, 19-20; DFW, 5.10.1930, 27-28; DFW, 19.10.1930, 21
[200] DFW, 21.12.1930, "*Die junge Generation in der Praxis*", 25-26

explained that the dissolution was justified by the conflict between the party and the Young Socialists, but even more so by the rebels' "non-Marxist class struggle politics." Their radicalism "was totally divorced from the political, economic and cultural reality". They exaggerated "the role of violent revolution, and failed to recognize the importance and value of evolution and reform."[201] Virtually all the members of the *Jungsozialisten* were to join the SAP later that year.

The reaction of youth leaders was considerably more outspoken and, as might be expected, uncompromising. Heinrich Häusgen from Dortmund, for instance, recognised the SPD's need to impose a "unity of action" to which all its affiliated organizations subscribed, but found the disciplinarian methods of the executive in dealing with the party's inner conflicts unimaginative and sterile. Häusgen pointed out that the tendencies observed among the Young Socialists were also present among wide sections of the militant working class, and were not caused solely by "the influence of certain 'Saxon' comrades, to remain unnamed"—a clear reference to Seydewitz and the *Klassenkampf* group. Häusgen decried the SPD's inability to harness the youth's energy and dedication where it would have counted most: on the streets. The youth was despondent in the face of the "extremist parties' enthusiastic and courageous propaganda, the marches of their uniformed supporters, and felt that, by comparison, the SPD was left behind." The youth believed that it had a "historical mission", and that the policy of the SPD left its "revolutionary energies fallow." As party elections were only weeks away, Häusgen ended his letter with a few eloquent calls: "Comrades...think of the youth! Give her

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[201] DFW, 21.12.1930, "*Irreführung der Jugend*", 16-18

executive positions! (*Gebt ihr Funktionen*). The youth should not have to enter in a conflict with the party in order to be allowed to work for our cause…Out with those who block the youth's path! Out with the bureaucrats!"[202]

By contrast, the letter of Theodor Schwieger from Berlin excluded all compromise. The conflict between the young and the old in the SPD was the result of the lack of revolutionary spirit in the older generation. Those who still had it were too few to "influence the face and content of the party movement." The generational conflict was rooted in history and was intractable. The old fighters, despite their heroism, were victims of the culture in which they developed: "the educational methods of the Wilhelminian state had triumphed. The instruments of that state—the school, the church, the *Stammtisch*, the press—have done their damage. The comrades have fought hard for political freedom, but…despite this they have remained under the spell of a *petit bourgeois* ideology". They continued to perpetuate the Wilhelmininan state with their "inoculated concern for peace and quiet (*Ruhe und Ordnung*) and respect for private property." The party grew to include employees, civil servants and academics; "philistinism and bureaucracy also grew." Workers also became party executives, but "most of these were only repressed *petit bourgeois* (*verhinderte Kleinbürger*). On account of their education,…they easily became bureaucrats, or what today is called 'bosses' (*Bonzen*)…These people, with their errors and deviations, discredit the party among the workers."

It was the mission of the revolutionary socialist youth to change all this,

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[202] ibid., "*Die Januarwahlen in der Partei und die Jugend*", 18-20

Schwieger concluded. The young Marxists in the *Jungsozialisten,* those in the SAJ who could escape the influence of the SPD official dogma, had the obligation radically to change the substance of the party. They had to "penetrate" the party apparatus in order to effect these changes: "not just in matters of political tactics, but in view of a life reform, in personal, day-to-day conduct..., in the work of proletarian education, in short, changes to the whole praxis of the party's daily life." This was a very vast and radical vision, that explicitly called for the rejection of the "old" Social Democratic culture and the forging of a truly Marxist, new one. There was no room for compromise and reconciliation; the break was final: "from the new realizations of the youth results a conflict with the old party comrades that forces us to throw overboard all piety, all respect for authority. It is in this spirit that we go to work."[203]

It is quite evident that, by the end of 1930, the SPD had lost the battle for the votes of the German youth. Not only did the party fail to attract the bourgeois or the Catholic proletarian youth, but it had serious difficulties in preventing many working-class young from joining the Communists or the Nazis. The SPD made a conscious decision to stick with experience and promote continuity and by-passed the opportunity of the 1930 elections to rejuvenate its ranks. Its propaganda changed little to accommodate the views and aspirations of the young. The party was also very concerned with maintaining control of its organizations, and the irreverent and radical attitude of the youth (especially the Young Socialists) was perceived as a threat. Fundamentally, however, reformism turned the youth off. The coalition and, later, the toleration tactics of

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[203] ibid., "*Karl Marx und die heutige Parteijugend*", 9-11

the SPD ran counter to the uncompromising nature of the youth and pushed an increasing number into joining the "revolutionary" parties of the KPD and NSDAP.

"*Stimmvieh*" or equal in the political struggle?: Women and the SPD, 1929-30

Youth felt marginalized in the SPD because of the organization's perceived inflexibility and mounting conservatism. Women, on the other hand, often felt excluded from, or merely tolerated in the great Social Democratic family due to their gender. Newcomers to the SPD, it seemed that women had joined the organization too late to have a significant input into the party's male proletarian culture, despite an auspicious beginning.

One of the great accomplishments of the Weimar republic was to enshrine women's right to vote in the constitution. This came about through a November 1918 decree of the Council of Peoples' Representatives comprised exclusively of Social Democrats (SPD and USPD), who had advocated for the female suffrage since the 1890s. Since the bourgeois parties had opposed the women's franchise almost to the last minute before the passing of the Constitution, there was a justified expectation that most women—now the largest segment of the voters' population—would give their ballots to the Social Democrats. While this proved correct in 1919, in the intervening years women tended to support "parties of a conservative, confessional bent."[204] Thus, generally,

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[204] J. Sneeringer. Winning Women's Votes, (London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 4

women accounted for circa sixty percent of the votes the Center party received during Weimar. In absolute numbers, however, the SPD, the largest party in the country, received the most votes. By 1930, women's ballots represented forty-seven percent of SPD's take at the polls. This contribution, combined with their increasing presence in the party (twenty-three percent of the total in 1930 versus 21.4 percent in July 1929[205]), made women a considerable force. It comes as no surprise, then, that many women (and not a few men) in the SPD were quite dissatisfied with the limited role they played in leading the party and their under-representation in the executive and the Reichstag fraction. In the turbulent 1929-1930 period, these concerns became magnified by the serious challenges the SPD, as the standard bearer of the Republic, was facing from the swelling anti-democratic forces in the country.

As Julia Sneeringer has documented, the SPD had made some significant strides in addressing women voters' concerns throughout the 1920s, by acknowledging the increasing complexity of the female's role in modern society (the New Woman), while also promoting an active policy of developing state welfare programs designed specifically for women. However, in its organizational practice, the SPD was not much different from most Weimar parties; women were systematically kept out of important positions, and their "activists' agendas blocked...through subtle strategies of neglect and accommodation to limited change."[206] In the next section, I will attempt to bring into focus the somewhat less examined attitudes and concerns of Social Democrat rank-and-file women about their experience in the party, as expressed in their letters to DFW in the

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[205] DFW, 8.12.1929, 13
[206] Sneeringer, 278-281

1929-1930 period.

The DFW proved to be, from its inception, a very cogenial forum for debates on women's issues. Soon after its debut, the periodical featured an article by Konrad Ludwig that pointed very bluntly to a certain narrow-mindedness in the party that kept women out of important positions. Were men "afraid of female competition?", Ludwig asked.[207] When more than 200,000 of the 960,000 members of the party were women, and when half of the nine million votes the party had received in the last elections were female votes, women had a right to request important positions in the party apparatus. Ludwig thought that, if women's merits were recognized, the party would prosper. They had the ability to convince other women to support the party and, with their position in the family, educate the younger generation in a Social Democratic spirit, thereby "checking the fluctuation in the organization's membership."

The numbers clearly showed that women were under-represented in the important SPD policy-making bodies. In the executive, out of seventeen members, only one woman (Marie Juhasz) had voting rights; the other two females (Anna Nemitz and Elfriede Ryneck) were honorary members with no voting rights.[208] In the national party apparatus, there were 268 paid secretaries of whom 261 were males and seven were females. A similar imbalance was present on the editorial boards of the influential SPD newspapers and journals, where 82 women were clearly in a minority among 442 men. These numbers were a confirmation of women's poor representation in German national policy-making bodies. Thus, to give only a few examples, in 1214 towns and cities, there were

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[207] DFW, 17.11.1929. "*Gegen die Holzklötze*", 10-12

[208] All the data in this paragraph were taken from DFW, 8.12.1929, "*Die Frau in der Partei*", 12-16

465 Social Democrat women city councilors versus 7197 aldermen; there were nineteen female deputies elected to the provincial legislatures versus 339 males; similarly, there were nineteen women elected to the Reichstag versus 134 men; there were no SPD women delegated to the Prussian *Staatsrat*, the province's upper chamber.

It is then not surprising that Ludwig's comments found ample echo among Social Democrats, from women and men, positive and negative. Anna Cordes from Soest, for instance, fully approved of Ludwig's remarks and lamented the fact that women were never placed in the first five positions on the lists for municipal elections. That was why, in her district there were no women sitting in the council. It was worse in the provincial elections, where ten men were put on the lists before the first woman candidate.[209]

Reports in the DFW suggest that women's political abilities did not warrant such mistrust. One correspondent credited the SPD victory in the Freital (Plauen) local elections to the social and propagandistic work of the women in the organization.[210] In this town the SPD received five hundred more female votes than male votes. In another letter, W.W. from Brandenburg recounted how, in Mildenberg auf der Mark, a woman established an SPD organization that was joined immediately by twenty-two members: all women. Eleven more females joined before the first fourteen men signed on. The women's work secured two thirds of the votes in the riding for the SPD list in the 1929 local elections. "We can do the job even without the . . . men", the correspondent proudly concluded.[211]

The bitter tenor of many women's letters, however, point to a deep-seated

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[209] DFW, 15.12.1929, "*'Wir Bedeutungslose'*", 16-17
[210] ibid., "*Der Freitaler Frauensieg*", 23-25
[211] ibid., "*Es geht auch ohne die Holzklötze*", 17-18

resentment towards not only the females' marginal role in the party but, more problematically, towards their general experience of working with men in politics or in the domestic sphere in a spirit of equality.[212] While the party was condemning any gender discrimination as "bourgeois" and non-Marxist, there was little discussion of the paternalistic relationships that still prevailed in the German proletarian family for fear of alienating its basis, the male worker.

In the period 1929-1930, the conflict between men and women in the labour market and in the home was centred around the issue of the married woman's right to work. This had become a very heated argument as the depression deepened and millions of men lost first their jobs and then their dignity as *pater familias*. As the large number of letters on the subject indicates, the object of men's wrath was the "double-earner" (*Doppelverdiener*)—a married woman who held a paid job and whose husband was also employed. Some believed their numbers to be in the millions, which caused many to believe that, should the women renounce their jobs, unemployment would be a thing of the past.

No subject stirred more passion among DFW readers in 1930 than that of the "double-earner". To illustrate how women were discriminated against, Ludwig attached at the end of his aforementioned article a letter from a young woman who had lost her job because she was a "*Doppelverdiener*". What was interesting was that she worked for the party and earned considerably more than her husband. She also supported her ailing parents materially. However, in the name of the "principle", she had to quit her job if the

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[212] DFW, 23.8.1930, 11-12

husband was to keep his.[213] Ludwig commented that the recent SPD party congress at Magdeburg had condemned all discrimination against women and that equal rights included the right to work. The reaction to this story was very strong from both sides.

Ludwig's call for a more open-minded treatment of women's issues among Social Democrats received immediate support from females at all levels of the movement. Toni Sender, the prominent chief editor of the influential Social Democrat magazine *"Frauenwelt"* wrote to convey her *"Bravo"* to Ludwig, and to celebrate the "struggle against philistines and imbeciles" (*Spießer und Trottel*).[214] Clara Zils-Eckstein, a member of SPD's Party Committee wrote to express her revulsion against an SPD mayor in Silesia who fired a party member from her position in a kindergarten because she was married and pregnant. Zils-Eckstein was despondent about the "backwardness" in the movement that prompted an executive of the Association of Social Democrat Teachers in Breslau to state that "in our opinion, a married woman belongs in the kitchen (*an den Kochtopf gehört*) and cares about the man's well-being."[215]

Such emotional expressions of solidarity were complemented by thoughtful attempts to inquire into the roots and consequences of such backwardness. Emmy Hackmarck from Bremen keenly remarked that failure to recognize the woman's right to paid work, whether married or not, weakened the labour movement in its struggle against the bourgeoisie. As economic crises and unemployment were unavoidable phenomena of the capitalist economic system, it was absurd to blame women's employment for the travails of jobless men. Those who ignorantly created the false issue of rivalry between

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[213] DFW, 17.11.1929, 12-13
[214] DFW, 23.2.1930, 10
[215] ibid., 11

men and women in the labour market " carried the capitalist competitive struggle inside the workers' movement" and weakened its solidarity.[216] To force females from jobs for the benefit of men soured women on the labour movement and drove them out of politics or in the opposite camp. The SPD had to correct this attitude.

The Berliner Gertrud Ellert urged that all debate over woman's employment had to pursue from an honest and sober examination of the reasons behind this controversy.[217] Most of the current discussions were charged with an emotionalism directly proportional with the growing unemployment. She challenged the contention that eliminating women from industrial work, for instance, would alleviate the crisis; there was no proof for it. The many thousands of women already removed from production had not caused any relief. Ellert thought it revealing that hardly anyone had asked the women to quit their jobs in industries relying on female labour, like the textile branch, but objected to their working in professions where there were no significant technical differences between males and females such as office work. Men were advised to look at women not as competitors in the labour market but as allies in the struggle for social reform for the benefit of all. If women were banned from work, they would certainly resort to working illegally, a course with dreadful psychological, political and social consequences.

Anna Vogel from Mainz insisted that the females' right to paid work (as opposed to her 'right' to domestic work) was not only of economic and psychological necessity to women, but of vital importance to the labour movement. Women could not be a committed and effective force for socialism unless they were educated about the class

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[216] ibid., "*Es geht auch ohne Männer*", 18-20
[217] ibid., "*Billige Sentimentalität*", 20-23

struggle, and this could not be accomplished by staying in the kitchen (*nicht am Kochtopf begreift mann den Klassenkampf, sondern im Betrieb*). Vogel also pointed out the double standard used to object to women "taking away" jobs from men; frequent situations, even in Social Democratic families, where fathers and children worked to supplement the household's income where not scrutinized at all by comparison. Vogel argued that granting women the right to vote while denying them equal right to work was tantamount to refusing them the prerogative to social and political independence and reducing them to undiscerning "voting animals" (*Stimmvieh*).[218]

The response of Social Democratic men to the question of women's role in the SPD and the issue of "double earning" was just as passionate and quite opinionated. Judging by the letters published in the DFW, very few men in the SPD had any understanding for married women working at all, or thought much about female contribution to the labour movement. The reactions ranged from mildly disapproving and dismissive to negative, bordering on misogyny, to downright vicious.

In the first category belongs the letter of J. de Kort, an SPD functionary from Frankfurt a.M. who, while congenial to the idea of equal rights for women, had a hard time justifying it in the SPD. First, women were not very eager to join the movement, and those who did were not the most capable. Second, the women who did join sought the "functions", started strongly, but failed in the long run. Diligent men should not be pushed aside to accommodate women. Equal rights for men and women did not mean equal numbers of functionaries of both sexes, but the best work force regardless of sex.

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[218] ibid., "*Einseitig gegen die Frau?*", 17-18

As for "double earners", functionaries like de Kort had to be very vigilant in order to eliminate them because nothing could justify them in the eyes of workers on unemployment assistance."[219]

A more censorious letter came from August Ahrens, an SPD district leader from Hamburg. He strongly disagreed with Ludwig's assessment that women accounted for just under fifty percent of SPD's votes; he estimated that as many females voted for the party as they were members in it: roughly 23-24 percent. As we know now, he was wrong, and Ludwig was quite right. Ahrens deemed women's work for the movement as unsatisfactory. Be it participation in meetings, flyers distribution or house-to-house propaganda, women accounted for no more than 20-25 percent in his riding. They did not seem to warm up to political work. Political work, Ahrens warned, could not be accomplished just by showing up for female leisure activities and film projections. Men were doing most of the propaganda work. The woman was eager to adopt "our" Social Democratic teaching and emancipate herself, "but wants nothing to do with politics and active collective work" (*von der Politik und der aktiven Mitarbeit will sie nichts wissen*). On the subject of "*Doppelverdienern*", Ahrens invoked the solidarity of the proletariat in calling for the elimination of "double earners" (*fort mit den Doppelverdienern*). He did not ask for women to surrender their jobs, but the suggestion was thinly veiled in his statement that "the catastrophic unemployment made the application of the decisions [on women's equal right to employment] of the Magdeburg Party Congress inapplicable."[220]

How conflicted the typical SPD man was over the issue of woman's right to work

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[219] DFW, 11.12.1929, *"Immer und überall die beste Kraft"*, 13-15
[220] ibid., "*Was leisten die Frauen?*", 12-13

is illustrated in the letter of W. Neumann, a trackman from Lower Silesia. He admitted that the female's right to paid work was undisputed by the party authorities to the last functionary; however, a plain worker could not remain blind to the "negative effects of women's employment." For one, if in a childless marriage both partners worked, the ensuing prosperity led to a bourgeois mentality; the working woman was, in effect, "a bridge...toward the bourgeois parties." Conversely, a woman busy in the home with "two or more children" and a factotum, only so that she can get by with the husband's income, would remain conscious of her class by virtue of her destitution and never defect. There was no justification for women to work so long as men's earnings sufficed. The party, Neumann charged, only made matters worse by not acting vigorously enough against the negative consequences of female work. It was a sign of the times, he complained, that a woman, like the one in Ludwig's letter, could earn 250 Marks while the man only made 150. He doubted that the woman in question missed her work; she just missed the money. Ludwig's appeal on behalf of women was a waste of time.[221]

If Neumann asked that women not work during the recession, Rudolf Nonn, a party, trade union, and consumer cooperative official from Hamburg, demanded that married women never work. By his own admission, he had been a fighter "for equal rights for women over four decades...not in theory but in practice." However, experience had taught him that married women had to be prevented from working: "equality for the woman should not be allowed to become a danger to herself, to her children, to man and to the whole labour movement." Why was the woman a threat? First, because three

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[221] DFW, 23.2.1930, "*Unsere Frau-die Proletarierin*", 12-14

million women were doing male jobs for which they were not suited. They were paid lower wages than men, thereby reducing the proletariat's purchasing power which depressed the economy even more and led to more unemployment. Second, since women were not suited for the jobs they took away from men, they soon got sick, had to be hospitalized or institutionalized. They became a burden for the health system. It was precisely these women who resorted to abortions, were chronically ill and died early. Third, Nonn reveals, it was "double earners" families that had "millions of children, children without education, without guidance; children who were neglected, who became depraved and...who ended up in correctional institutions, jails and prisons. All this because the mother, the sister and the bride forced a young man out of work." Young men like these were lost to the movement. Fourth, these "double earners" were the hardest to organize because nobody was ever home to receive the dues collector. Most did not want to get organized because they lived so well. Fifth, woman's work promoted alcoholism because the family fell apart. The man couldn't find a cooked meal when he returned home from the factory, he takes to the bottle and "the woman sits in the movie theatre." Sixth, men got used to women earning money, turned into slave drivers, even murdered their wives. There was no end to the ills caused by women's employment. The moral was that four million men had to steel themselves and withdraw their wives from the job market. Then, unemployed men would occupy those jobs. Soon, "hospitals, correctional institutions, jails and prisons would be empty."[222]

These thoughts betrayed a conception of the role of women in family and society

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[222] ibid., "*Halt vor dem Fabrikator!*", 14-17

that remained rooted in a paternalistic, bourgeois model originating in the past century. In theory, Social Democratic thought had advocated equal rights for women in all aspects of life. In practice, however, it had done little to educate its adherents in adopting more progressive views on the emotional and social needs of the modern woman. This issue was seldom discussed, undoubtedly because it was clearly un unpopular subject with the main supporter of the movement, the male industrial worker. When it was discussed, it afforded a glance into the serious deficits the movement had to overcome before it could rally the majority of voters under its banner.

In one such attempt at honest introspection, Willi Hilbig from Berlin found the German proletarian family head in need of revising his attitude towards the woman and the family.[223] One had to go beyond the "beautiful phrases about solidarity, socialism and community, and...be an example through one's deeds rather than lip service" (*Lippenbekenntnis*). Hilbig found that the relationships in the family had to change according to socialist ideas. The main obstacle to overcome here was the "male worker who still harboured *petit bourgeois* ideas and concepts centred around the notion of authority." Oppressed at work, the proletarian thought to recover his self-esteem at home, in the family, by playing the ruler unchallenged in his authority. This resulted in an education that had people alternate between a domineering and a submissive behaviour. Youth and women were the victims of this tradition of male centredness and male domination. Women's toil and contribution to family and society was insufficiently recognized. Clearly appealing to the working man, Hilbig clamoured for more "respect,

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[223] DFW, 27.4.1930, "*Sozialimus in Alltag*", 25-26

solidarity and understanding" in family relationships.[224]

After the flurry of responses provoked by Ludwig's articles abated, the subject of women's rights and role in society or in the SPD was rarely broached in DFW. In January 1931, more than a year after the publication of Ludwig's appeal, Louise Schroeder, the Social Democrat mayor of Berlin, rued the fact that if much was written about efforts to bring the youth into the movement, very little had been done over the past year to attract more women to the SPD. The explanation for the troubling fact that the SPD had received fewer female votes in the September elections than had been expected was that, despite the rhetoric, little had changed to make the party more attractive to women. Schroeder believed that there were still no local organizations led by women and could guarantee that no woman ever presided in a district organization. She complained that the brochures and other forms of propaganda disseminated by the SPD addressed no specific issues concerning women. Most discussed general topics like "the economy", but did not explain how these issues affected or involved women specifically.[225]

Marte Ellgert from Berlin also blamed SPD's disappointing performance at the polls, particularly with the female voters, on the lack of positive change. The commitments to engage women more in the leadership of the party "had been poorly satisfied." In certain electoral districts female candidates were completely left off the lists, while in others, they were placed "so low, that there was no chance of their getting in the Parliament." With sixteen female MPs among 143 SPD Reichstag deputies, women were poorly represented, Ellgert wrote. She called for more women in

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[224] ibid., "*Halt vor dem Fabrikator!*", 14-17
[225] DFW, 18.01.1931, "*Wie gewinnen wir die Frauen für die Partei?*", 19-20

Parliament, both as a reflection of their political work on behalf of Social Democracy, and as a political statement bound to convince more women to vote SPD in the future.[226]

But, if chief editor's Heimann rejoinder to this entreaty was any indication—and it was—, the SPD was not going to promote more women. In a terse response to Ellgert, Heimann pointedly reminded her that the "National Socialists had no women among their candidates; despite this, they received at least three million females votes. It was a shaming proof of the backwardness of the female voter."[227]

This answer was typical of the SPD's poor self-critical assessment of its work aimed at politicizing women in support of socialism. The Nazis, it was implied, received three million female votes not because the SPD failed to attract those voters but because women were backward politically. The SPD had not lost many female votes in comparison to the previous elections, but had fallen flat in its efforts to entice the many first-time and undecided women voters. As suggested in many letters, this failure occurred because the SPD neglected to produce propaganda specifically for women (except for electoral campaigns), that spoke to their particular concerns in a language they could understand. The SPD confused many women rather than enlightening them. On the one hand it promoted class solidarity over gender solidarity; on the other hand, when the issue of "double earning" became contentious, it was reluctant to come out strongly and defend the woman's equal right to work. It cost the party millions of votes.

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[226] DFW, 19.10.1930, "*Mehr weibliche Abgeordnete!*", 22
[227] ibid.

"*Hand- und Kopfarbeiter, vereinigt euch!*": SPD and the white-collar workers 1929-1930

If the SPD squandered the potential to secure many women's votes at the end of Weimar, it also proved incapable of attracting the support of most white-collar workers, civil servants and other intellectual workers. This failure was an important element in the SPD's series of political defeats between 1930 and 1933. The unrelenting growth of the SPD appeared to have come to a sudden stop immediately before the outbreak of the Great War. Beginning with 1913, the Social Democratic movement entered a phase of stagnation that raised crucial questions about the political direction it had to take.[228] One important inference resulting from the analysis of this reality was that Social Democracy could not expect to come to power or introduce socialism in a democratic manner if it relied solely on the support of the proletariat. This and other related conclusions formed the arguments behind Bernsteinian revisionism.[229]

The crucial question that arose from the realization of stagnation was whether the party would have to transform itself from a "class party" into a "people's party" (*Volkspartei*). That meant, in practical terms, the active wooing of the middle-class and of the small farmer. Members of the petty bourgeoisie, particularly salaried employees, low and medium civil servants (including teachers), technicians, and a small number of artisans and shopkeepers had joined the SPD before the turn of the century. Most small shopkeepers and artisans, however, never did sympathise much with Social Democratic ideology. Heavily influenced in their political thinking by the protectionist policies of the

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[228] C. Schorske, 267-69
[229] Hunt, 133

Kaiserreich, this group aligned itself with those parties that promised to continue such policies, like the DDP, the DVP and, later, the Economic Party. As none of these parties delivered to their satisfaction, by 1930, the majority of small shopkeepers and artisans threw their support behind the NSDAP.[230]

However, middle-class socialists exerted a significant influence in the SPD. In the early 1930s, twenty-one percent of its leaders were bourgeois intellectuals.[231] Overall, though, the number of salaried employees and civil servants in the SPD had declined between 1912 and 1924, a trend that upset Social Democrats who viewed these groups as "proletarians blinded to reality by false consciousness."[232] Despite sustained work, employees and civil servants who joined socialist trade unions like the AfA and ADB were a minority compared to those who enrolled in bourgeois professional associations. By 1929, the SPD had not given up on the idea of mustering the "proletarian" middle-class under its banner, but there were points of resistance and tensions at work that made this task a difficult one. In this case also, the DFW served as an outlet for civil servants, functionaries, industrial workers, and other Social Democrats to express their suggestions and, often, passionate opinions regarding the class composition of the party.

By the end of 1929, the future presence of intellectuals, civil servants and white-collar employees in the party was a serious concern. Its sinking popularity among university students boded ill for SPD's plans of attracting more of the German middle-

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[230] H.A. Winkler, "Vom Protest zur Panik: Der gewerbliche Mittelstand in der Weimarer Republik", in *Industrielles System und politische Entwicklung in der Weimarer Republik* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1974), 778-9

[231] Hunt, 102

[232] Harsch, 30

class to its ranks.[233] As Heidelberg district judge Hugo Marx posited, this troubling trend was born from the still undefined relationship of the party with the intellectuals and the middle class. The clarification of this issue was not a simple matter. One major problem was that these non-proletarian groups stood under the suspicion of organizing with a view to retaining some of the privileges they traditionally enjoyed. This ran counter to the very essence of Social Democracy. Marx denied that most intellectuals supported such endeavours.[234]

Another problem was that the intellectuals aspiring to leadership in the party were often viewed with mistrust by their proletarian colleagues. Again, Marx pleaded for an open mind and demanded that intellectuals be afforded the same opportunity to lead as any other group. It would be a loss to the party, he cautioned, if the SPD wasted those talents and qualifications for which intellectuals were nurtured and trained. The task of the SPD was to create "a framework that offered the intellectuals room" within which this group could use their specific gifts and expertise for the benefit of the movement.[235] This framework was to take the shape of an intellectual association within the SPD, which would deal only with intellectual matters.

The response from Social Democrats to this suggestion was swift and negative. K.Schreiner from Strausberg i.d. Mark wrote that he, as a manual labourer, found Marx's article "incomprehensible: the Social Democratic Party recognized only members in the organization: men and women." He could not accept the idea that the party had to "clarify its position" towards intellectuals. Nor could he accept that the party "had" to divide its

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[233] DFW, 17.11.1929, "*Das Verhältnis der Partei zu den Intellektuellen*", 21-26
[234] ibid., 22
[235] ibid., 25

membership into "educated and less educated." Was not a worker with years of political education the equal of a "Dr. lawyer, a jurisconsult, or a district judge?". Schreiner totally rejected the idea of an "intellectual association" as the worst kind of particularism: "Landsberg, David, Kautsky, Haase, Stampfer, Kurt Rosenfeld,...Levi, and hundreds of others had gained the confidence of their party comrades without a Social Democratic *intellectual association.*" And so it had to remain. He did not foment "disrespect for the educated, but [there was no room] for arrogance in the party either."[236]

School board member Kluge from Grimma was equally against the plan for a SPD intellectual association. He reasoned that intellectuals were "individualists to begin with", so a separate body such as that would only encourage "separatism and isolationism" (*Absonderung und Abkapselung*).[237] The exact opposite had to happen, Kluge posited. The intellectuals had to mix more with the workers and use their special training and capacities to understand the latter better. Only in this manner could they realize the hard life of the proletariat and commit themselves to socialism. Intellectuals as a group had a different sociological structure than the working class. This was precisely why, Kluge reasoned, the original and real distance between the intellectuals and the proletariat should not be preserved artificially inside the party. A separate organization for the intellectuals would work against bridging the gap. Furthermore, this distance had to be eliminated because of the special task prescribed to the intellectuals. They were the group entrusted to lead in the creation of a new socialist culture that was to replace the outdated bourgeois culture that had permeated to a large extent even the working class. In

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[236] DFW, 22.12.1929.*Ein Antwort an Genossen Marx*, 15-16
[237] ibid,. "*Abkapselung der Intellektuellen?*", 20-23

view of this crucial responsibility, Social Democratic intellectuals had to forego particularism.

Kurt Freyer, also a man of higher education, rejected Marx's argument for a separate intellectual organization for the sake of unity. An educator in the countryside, he reckoned that such an idea "had to have been cooked in the city, where manual worker and brain-worker hardly know each other."[238] The intellectual had to get closer to the worker and help him educate himself. Like Kluge, Freyer believed that intellectuals had to help in the development of the new culture taking shape in the proletarian tenements. He also echoed Kluge's conviction that the highest duty for the intellectual was to participate in the forging of a new order that would put an end to the exploitation of the worker.

A common attempt to warn against intellectual particularism by 'explaining' the phenomenon through Marxist materialism did not usually sound as genuine. Bruno Lieber, for instance, demonstrated through a text-book application of vulgar Marxism how the primacy of "matter" and "material contradictions" recommended against a separate intellectual organization inside the SPD. In its "materialist" battle to keep the proletariat dispossessed, capitalism used the middle-class intellectuals as a tool. For this purpose, the intellectuals were afforded a higher economic status; therefore, they had little interest in changing the existing order. If intellectuals "corrupted" by bourgeois ideas joined the SPD and were allowed to form their own separate organization, Lieber warned, there was a grave danger they would "contaminate" and destroy the party.

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[238] ibid., "*Intellektuelle Extravaganzen*", 23-24

Despite the intellectuals' claims that they joined the SPD because of "higher ideals", at bottom the explanation was material: "love and hatred result from material contradictions." Their privileged material condition made intellectuals incapable of being critical enough of the capitalist system. That is why they could not be totally trusted.[239]

If the SPD rank and file viewed intellectuals with a healthy dose of suspicion, this could not be claimed about their attitude toward white-collar workers like sales and office personnel. Except for the small farmer, the Great Depression had hit the white-collar workers harder, in relative terms, than any other group in German society. Among this group, unemployment went up by fifty percent during 1930 and, again, by a further fifty percent in 1931.[240] Although at ten percent they constituted a sizable group in the party, their "material" conditions were the same or worse, by 1929, than those of the industrial workers and, therefore, they were not seen as profiting from the crisis at the expense of workers or as disingenuous "beneficiaries of the Republic" (*Nutznießer der Republik*).

The opposite was true about civil servants (*Beamten*). The Weimar constitution had guaranteed the privileged status of the civil service in order to secure its support for the Republic.[241] This plan was, at best, a partial success. High and mid-level civil servants left over from the Kaiserreich never did warm up to the Republic. A small percentage of low-level government employees (mostly teachers and postal and railway workers) joined the SPD and were, socially and materially, much closer to the industrial

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[239] DFW, 22.12.1929, "*Die materiellen Sonderinteressen der Intellektuellen*", 24-27
[240] Larry E. Jones, "The Crisis of the White-Collar Interest Politics: Deutschnationaler Handlungsgehilfen-Verband and the DVP in the World Economic Crisis" in *Industrielles System*, 815
[241] Peukert, 225

workers than their superiors in the ministries. As conditions worsened, workers' resentment against civil servants' relative job security and guaranteed salaries grew. When, in 1929, the Müller government came under pressure from its bourgeois coalition partners to scale down social services in order to balance the budget, the workers' wrath focused on civil servants' salaries and privileges.

The number of virulent letters sent to DFW in 1929-30 by the SPD rank and file protesting *Beamten*'s salaries attest to the fact that most Social Democrats did not see civil servants as fellow proletarians or even as Social Democratic "fellow-travellers". Reacting to a call from Erich Krenke in DFW in February 1930 for an "emergency" reduction in civil servants' salaries, Alfred Bräutigam wrote: "in party meetings...it is enough for one to utter the phrase 'government employees' pay' and a murmur of resentment goes through the ranks." Workers were looking to civil servants (particularly the Social Democratic ones) to make a sacrifice in order to balance the federal budget. Many supported this view.[242]

By the end of 1929, there were 3.5 million unemployed in Germany. Government revenues were falling short by 500 million marks, 250 million of which were needed to cover the deficit in the unemployment insurance program.[243] Civil servants were not contributing to this fund. Bräutigam, like many others[244], was asking that they contribute to the program and accept a pay cut. When an unemployed worker was getting twenty marks a week in unemployment assistance, and an employed worker forty-five in wages,

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[242] DFW, 2.3.1930, "*Beamte und Arbeitslosenversicherung*", 21; "*Reichswohnungnotopfer aller Festbesoldeten*", 22
[243] DFW, 16.2.1930, "*Beamte und Arbeiter*", 13
[244] ibid., "*Zur Sanierung der Arbeitslosenversicherung*", 17-18

it was obscene for a civil servant to earn five hundred per month, or double that amount for superior officials. Bräutigam was aware that if the SPD tried to pass a law for such a reduction, it stood to "lose some votes from the high government officials, but it would even out with the votes it would receive from workers and small farmers."[245]

Hans Vogel from Dresden thought the same. The SPD had to show the "courage to become unpopular" with some civil servants, and it would get its rewards in the next elections.[246] He proposed a five percent surtax on salaries over five hundred marks and twenty-five percent on those exceeding three thousand marks per month. Johan Walter, a metal worker from Gladbach, suggested that, if the law did not pass in the Reichstag, SPD civil servants should voluntarily take a pay cut in favour of a children's nourishment program, an act that would pay dividends in future elections.[247] Even some high office holders agreed with a salary reduction. Franz Zwirnmann, a superior custom officer, found it justified, and pointed out that many retired officers still worked, which made them "double-earners". If the law did not pass, why not try a plebiscite, he suggested; "unlike the Hugenberg *Volksentscheid*, this one would probably succeed."[248]

For many Social Democrats, the idea of alienating the civil servants was not even an issue. As a group, they were seen as bourgeois leaning towards the conservative parties or even the NSDAP, with the possible exception of the low-level public employees who accounted for most of the roughly 30,000 *Beamten* in the SPD. Advocating for the pay cut law, Wilhelm Kalb, a party functionary from Gera, rejected

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[245] DFW, 16.2.1930, "*Wo bleiben wir Arbeiter?*", 15-16
[246] ibid., "*Reichshaushalt und Beamtenbesoldung*", 16-17
[247] ibid., "*Höchstgehaltsabbau als Wahlfrage!*", 17
[248] ibid., "*Ein Volksentscheid?*", 18

the idea that it would hurt the party. He was certain that "ninety percent of civil servants were [SPD] enemies of the fanatical kind....Most saw it as an offence to be lumped in with the proletariat." If anything, protecting them hurt the organization's image as a "party of the masses."[249]

A worker from Silesia, who gave only his initials for fear of retribution, could vouch that in the towns around the Silesian Polish border there was not one SPD civil servant to be found. In his area, there were three officials: two members of the "*Stahlhelm*" and one DNVP. He was certain that all working people there, urban or rural, strongly supported knocking down civil servants' salaries.[250] Frieda Martens, an unemployed woman from Munich, had witnessed in her former job at the city hall "how much the majority of civil servants hated the Republic." But, what incensed her the most was that civil servants used their positions to secure jobs for their wives, thereby enjoying double incomes when millions of workers went hungry.[251]

The attempt of the party press to appease the workers and its appeals for moderation and "camaraderie" had little effect. When Heilmann wrote in a February issue of the DFW about workers' "petty envy" towards civil servants, the reaction was vehement. Bernhard Czerwinski from Essen accused Heilmann of insensitivity to the plight of workers. High salaries had to be reduced when workers lived on twenty marks per week. Hilferding, the SPD minister of finance, was a failure for not doing something in the Reichstag to fix this problem, Czerwinski wrote. The leaders of the party (that included Heilmann also) were guilty of not looking after the interests of the party's base:

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[249] ibid., "*Himmelschreiendes Mißverhältnis*", 18
[250] ibid., "*Woher der Unwille kommt*", 19
[251] DFW, 2.3.1930, "*Beamte-Doppelverdiener*", 16-17

the workers.[252] Two metal workers from Hanau wrote to protest the scandalous salaries, pensions, and double-earning. They urged the SPD leaders to reject salaries in excess of 8000 marks per year. If a law for reducing high salaries did not pass in the Reichstag, they called for extra-parliamentary action.[253] Robert Roller, a factory foreman from Stuttgart, also blamed the SPD leadership for not doing enough to educate the civil servants about the necessity of contributing to the unemployment fund and of making a temporary sacrifice for the benefit of ten million of their compatriots who lived in misery.[254] Franz Wilken of Jüterbog described salaries that reached thousands per month a "betrayal of the people" and as "injustices that cried to heaven."[255] He and others[256] also pointed out that the Communists and the Nazis used the salaries issue to incite hatred among some workers, middle-class burghers and small farmers against the SPD.

During this dispute, some Social Democrats insisted that the practical aspect of cutting *Beamten* salaries was not the main point, nor was the success (or failure) of the SPD in passing the law through the Reichstag; what was important was that the proletariat could see that the SPD kept fighting for its interests. As Karl Mache, a worker from Hausberge a. d. Porta, put it, "the bourgeois parties want to carry on a financial reform at the cost of social services [unemployment benefits]; we can't take the gross injustice lying down when to one side money is given with both hands, while from the other side, the proletariat, the few pennies that keep them from famine are been taken

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[252] DFW, 2.3.1930, "*Aussprechen, nichts vertuschen!*", 13-14
[253] ibid., "*Zur Opfertat*", 15
[254] ibid., "*Sorgt für den praktischen Erfolg!*, 18
[255] ibid., "*Mehr soziales Empfinden!*", 19
[256] ibid., "*Agitatorisch wirken*", 15

away."[257] Even if the law did not receive the two thirds of the votes necessary to pass, the political agitation around it benefited the SPD while pointing the finger at its opponents. Two activists from Darmstadt exhorted the party to follow the example of its Hesse branch which had already tabled a motion in the regional parliament to reduce the salaries of high officials, "who, like pensioners were usufructuaries of the republic but enemies of it, while the workers and the low civil servants were its supporters."[258]

Of course, DFW gave equal space to Social Democratic civil servants who pleaded their case, especially since Heilmann disagreed with the pay cutting idea.[259] Most pointed out that they were not earning more than three or four hundred marks per month, and that making them scapegoats for workers' misery drove a wedge between these two groups, which were equally victims of capitalism.[260] This made little impression, since the wrath was not directed against the low-level civil servants to begin with.

The discussion over civil servants' income (including SPD officials) and their loyalty to the Republic was to continue with more or less intensity in the following months. It was obvious that, by 1930, the SPD was not the party of choice for middle-class groups such as intellectuals, white-collar employees and civil servants, nor were the latter particularly welcomed by the rank and file. Shallow Marxist theoretizing made the exodus of white-collar employees to the SPD a matter of "when" rather than "if". That they had not done so yet was explained away with glib talk of "lack of political

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[257] ibid., "*Das Beispiel*", 14-15
[258] ibid., "*Beschluß der hessischen Sozialdemokratie*", 16
[259] ibid., "*Schlußwort*", 24
[260] ibid., "*Wir Beamte. Aussichtslos und parteischädigend*", 24-26; "*Wir fühlen uns verbunden*", 26; "*Ein Wort zum Frieden*", 26-27; "*Privatunternehmer und Beamter*", 27-28; "*Stehkragen und Bluse*", 28-29; "*Vom gewerkschaftlichen Standpunkt aus*", 29-30

experience."[261]

After the September 1930 federal elections, it became clear that, despite sustained endeavours, the SPD had failed to attract a large percentage of the groups discussed above. Objective economic interests as well as cultural obstacles such as traditional distance between the middle-class and the proletariat made a political union between the working and the middle classes a daunting task. However, the SPD's efforts in this direction produced an unforeseen effect: alienating some sections of the proletariat. As some of the letters presented here show, many workers and party members were deeply dissatisfied with the party's direction and leadership. Karl Klinga, an SPD factory committee president from Berlin, explained the SPD's loss of proletarian votes through the party's disproportionate concern with white-collar and civil servants' interests at the expense of the working class.[262] In a statement which made clear that, in his conception , the interests of these groups were not easily reconciled, he wrote:

> the call for a dictator, even among workers, is nothing but the expression of dissatisfaction with the speciousness and obstructionism of the ever more unwieldy administrative apparatus; not just at state level or in the village, but in industry and in workers' organizations. When large masses of workers lean towards left or right radicals, they only follow their instinctive feeling that they are being neglected for the benefit of civil servants and white-collar workers.

"Das Land...stiefmütterlich behandelt"-SPD and the political mobilization of farmers, 1929-1930

Despite the rapid industrialization and urbanization of the previous one hundred

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[261] DFW, 31.8.1930, Erich Rüdinger, "*Angestellte, Sozialdemokratie und Reichstagswahl*", 23-24
[262] DFW, 5.10.1930, "*Arbeiter. Meister, Beamte*", 15-16

years, by 1918, the agricultural sector was still an important social and political force in Germany. In 1907, this sector employed 35.2 percent of the population, and after Versailles, even with the significant loss of territory and population, it still engaged just under thirty percent of the German population.[263] It comes as no surprise, then, that given the party's stagnation, many Social Democrats regarded the inclusion of the agricultural proletariat and of the small and middling farmers into the movement as a very important objective. This realization, however, translated into a definite plan of action quite late. An agrarian plan that also included social programs for small farmers was not adopted until 1927. Even then, partly because of the ambivalence of a large section of urban SPD activists, the resources allocated to mobilize the countryside were limited in quantity and quality.[264] Thus, despite some effort, by 1930 the agricultural proletariat represented only 1.8 percent of the party's membership.[265] The concerns raised by these realities were frequently and clearly expressed by SPD activists who worked in this field.

On the eve of the November 1929 local elections, the Bavarian Otto Meinecke lamented the unsatisfactory work the SPD was accomplishing in the countryside. The need for agitation there was great, and the chances for success were good if the proper work was done, he wrote. The objective economic situation of the peasant dictated that he was a potential ally of the industrial worker. However, there were some obstacles to be overcome: the ignorance of the peasant, his lack of interest, and, for those employed by large estate owners, his fear of being fired by the landlord. Stressing that the SPD needed the small farmers (*Wir brauchen die Landarbeiter)*, Meinecke complained that few

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[263] Dieter Geßner, "*Industrie und Landwirtschaft 1928-1930*", in *Industrielles System*, 762-763
[264] Harsch, 31
[265] Hunt, 105

resources were dedicated to this important work. Little propaganda was done here, where the political opinion of the senior landholder (*Großagrarier*) went almost unchallenged. He asked that more qualified agitators be sent to rural areas, and that agriculture concerns be discussed more in the party press. It was time that the SPD stop treating the countryside "like a stepmother" (*das Land wird noch immer stiefmütterlich behandelt*).[266]

Wahlter Pahl, a propagandist active in an area near the Polish border, remarked how inappropriate the "all-purpose rural propaganda material" proved to be. Heavy on theory, this material was going nowhere with the "pigheaded Farmers' Union peasant". But the farmer would listen to concrete proposals to do something about the low prices of rye and potatoes. Like Meinecke, Pahl criticized the SPD election propaganda literature designed for the agriculture as mostly irrelevant. He also called it a grave mistake to send young, inexperienced agitators into the villages while the experienced ones worked the cities. The reverse had to happen; the mistrust of the peasant could only be overcome by workers seasoned in political debate. Pahl also recommended that the work of attracting the farmer had to continue year round not just before the elections. Like women, peasants complained that they were solicited only when the SPD needed their ballots ("*Wenn Sie Stimmvieh brauchen, kommen auch die Sozialdemokraten zu uns!*").

The world-wide economic crisis had hit farmers just as hard as the industrial worker, if not harder. The SPD had a good opportunity to rally the small farmers to its side if it could influence agrarian state policies in the small producer's favour. The DNVP and the DVP had done little to help this hard-hit group. Echoing Pahl, Paul

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[266] DFW, 17.11.1929, "*Mahnruf vom Lande*", 19-21

Tamaske, an SPD official from Silesia, believed that the party could secure support from the farmers, if it could manage to devise and pass through Parliament a series of measures to help the hard-hit farmers, particularly the rye growers in eastern Germany. This was absolutely imperative, because, by and large, the countryside supported right-wing politics ("*ganz und gar rechts eingestellten Dörfer*").[267]

The SPD did not succeed in this[268], although through no fault of their own; structural problems in German agriculture that went back to the Kaiserreich could not be solved by passing a few protectionist laws; just as important, many branches of the industry depended on export to function and, therefore, rejected protectionist policies at home for fear of certain reprisals from abroad.[269]

Just days before the resignation of the Müller government, R. Masanek from Harksheide in Schleswig, wrote about the changes the SPD had to make to its rural agitation in order to improve its chances of success in the next elections. First, the mentality that the work in the countryside was unimportant ("*sei nicht der Rede wert*") had to change. Rank-and-file workers and leadership had to take responsibility for poor work that had led to serious setbacks to the plan to make the SPD a significant presence in rural Germany. Second, the SPD periodical *Die Gemeinde* dedicated to rural issues was too theoretical in its discussions, which "were not always applicable in practice". Third, Social Democrat district and subdistrict organizations were urged to dedicate more time and resources to rural concerns. Only by listening to the farmers could the party

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[267] DFW, 23.2.1930, "*Gute Zeit für Landagitation*", 23

[268] The Müller government did pass an "Eastern Prussia Law" (*Ostpreußengesetz*) in early 1929, just before it dissolved. The Brünning government continued with a similar program, but in the opinion of Ernst Hamburger (DFW, 31.8.1930, "*Osthilfe und Ostpolitik*", 10-19) it favoured the large estates.

[269] Geßner, 77

devise a policy guaranteed to "win back the votes the NSDAP won [in the November communal elections] from small farmers and farm hands (*Landarbeiter*) by taking advantage of their distress." Finally, the SPD had to establish a permanent contact with the farmers through knowledgeable cadre, preferably cadre originally from the countryside. These competent advisors had to be constantly present among the farmers, "not just eight days before the elections."[270]

How far behind its design to mobilize the countryside the SPD was emerges plainly from an article written by Paul Lehmann from Breslau. He reported that in Central Silesia, among the two thousand villages, the SPD had organized 360 rural associations. In some others, it had "representatives" (*Vertrauensleute*). He considered this situation very unsatisfactory. Lehmann decried the trend of the SPD losing the communal elections in villages where it had the majority in 1925, often at "catastrophic rates." He blamed this development on SPD representatives' questionable competence. Even when they won, "they didn't know what to do with their majority" (*die Gemeindeverträter hatten mit ihrer Mehrheit nichts anzufangen gewußt*). The SPD had still managed to elect three thousand rural representatives in the 1929 elections, but the party would fare no better, he wrote, if they lacked the knowledge to use their positions to help the rural population and, thereby, gain more votes for the party. Lehmann, therefore, asked for a more thorough training of the party's rural representatives and for a "re-examination of our rather primitive preparation in rural politics" (*Ueberprüfung unserer noch etwas*

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[270] DFW, 23.3.1930, "*Schulung für die Landgemeinde*", 15-16

primitiven Einrichtungen für Kommunalpolitik).[271]

Things did not improve much between March and August 1930. Just two weeks before going to the polls, Rudolf Hörkster from Burgsteinfurt in Westphalia wrote that it was hard to mobilize the voters in the countryside for the elections because there "the SPD was represented weakly or not at all." In Münsterland especially, a strongly Catholic region, there was need for more propaganda as people got their information from "biased Centre Party press."[272] In a similar tone, Ernst Hampe from Ederitz, Anhalt, complained that the timing of the elections did not favour an effective propaganda; at the end of August, farmers were too busy from dawn to dusk with the harvest to read flyers or newspapers. Propaganda meetings did not work well either, as voters did not show up and sometime even party members stayed away.[273] A.Weghorn from Wurchow in Pomerania lamented that electoral work was difficult in rural areas dominated by large estates owners. Squires, bitter enemies of the SPD, had great influence over the local population, not least because they were major employers.[274] C. Bedau from Passendorf by Halle also pointed to the heavy influence "lords of the manor" (*Rittergutbesitzer*) had in preserving a conservative political opinion in the countryside. Here, the SPD had to work very hard to convince the small farmer that its agrarian policies, including break-up of great properties and redistribution of land, had the peasant's best interest at heart. This proved very difficult as the typical farmer was so "obstinately conservative that he would rather follow the grand squires and rich farmers in tow and vote against his own interests

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[271] DFW, 23.3. 1930, "*3000 Gemeinde-vertreter sind in Schlesien zu schulen*", 16-18
[272] DFW, 31.8.1930, "*Die Mobilisierung des Landes*", 26-27
[273] ibid., "*Praktische Wahlarbeit auf dem Lande*", 27
[274] ibid., "*Im Reich des Großgrundbesitzes*", 28

than let himself be convinced that the SPD was not after his last cow...."[275]

As widely feared, the SPD received few ballots from rural voters in the September elections. In an effort to learn from the defeat, SPD functionaries attempted to draw relevant conclusions and formulate recommendations for the future. Thus, Emil Bosse from Amberg in the Palatinate asked for better organizing in preparing electoral work, as resources and people's time were wasted on poor results. He also suggested that in the future only competent comrades be sent to agitate in the countryside. He could report of situations in which propagandists had to be bailed out when they were cornered by peasants and could not retort because they "had no idea about the SPD agrarian program" (*von unserem Agrarprogramm ...keine blasse Ahnung hatten*).[276] Elisabeth Dammit from Tornau in Saxony-Anhalt also reported how ignorant the farmers were about SPD's plans for the agriculture. When informed, though shaken in their beliefs, they could not let go of their misconceptions stirred up by the Nazis and the conservative *Landbünde*, agrarian employers' associations established to prevent the proliferation of rural workers' trade unions.[277] She also mentioned the farmers' displeasure that their support was only sought at election time (*Wenn Wahl ist, kommen alle, um Stimmen zu fangen*).[278]

A festering sore point was brought up by A. Kolb, a farmer from Schwebheim in Saxony. He decried the fact that the SPD had no farmers on its electoral lists, and none in the Reichstag. The party had, naturally, factory workers, white-collar workers and civil

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[275] ibid., "*Steuerzahler auf dem Lande*", 28-30
[276] DFW, 21.9.1930, "*Versammlungstechnik*", 21
[277] Jens Flemming, "*Großagrarische Interessen und Landarbeiterbewegung*" in *Industrielles System*,750-55
[278] DFW, 21.9.1930, "*Helft dem Dorf!*", 21-22

servants on its lists of candidates; however, despite the fact that farmers were a sizable percentage of the population, they had no representatives in Reichstag. If the SPD wanted to have more success *auf dem Lande*, Kolb admonished, it had to correct this oversight.[279]

This last point epitomizes the deficiencies of the SPD's rural policies. While the party recognized fairly early that it needed the support of farmers if it aimed to consolidate its political pre-eminence in the state, it proved incapable of developing a strong presence in the countryside. As a result of this, the SPD had a weak understanding of the rural society, its values, its political proclivities, its mistrust of leftist politics and how to combat this suspicion. The SPD tried to develop an agrarian program to address the pressing needs of the hard-hit farmers, but could not reconcile the conflicting interests of food consumers (the great majority urban workers) and food producers (mostly farmers).[280] Moderate measures to protect the tens of thousands of small farmers threatened with the foreclosure of their lands by banks were rejected as "short-term" and benefiting only the "decaying large estates".[281] This policy contributed nothing toward making the SPD more popular in the countryside. The dearth of qualified rural propagandists and the allocation of few resources for agitation work in the villages prevented the party from competing effectively with the DNVP and the NSDAP for the rural vote. Finally, the SPD's "rational" and "theoretical" approach to "solving" the peasantry's economic problems or to addressing the latter's political "backwardness" lent its agitation an air of condescension that made the populism of the Nazis, for instance,

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[279] ibid., "*Warum keine Bauer?*", 22
[280] R. Schaefer, 276
[281] DFW, 31.8.1930, "*Die Bauernpartei der Zukunft*", 30

that much more attractive. All these factors combined to frustrate SPD's efforts to secure a strong support base in the countryside against the anti-republican onslaught.

Conclusion

The SPD was facing a serious crisis at the beginning of 1931. The party was limping on after the setback suffered in the September 1930 elections. This defeat was compounded by the shocking success of its main enemies, the NSDAP and, to a lesser extent, of the KPD. The rapidly worsening economic situation had consequences that robbed the SPD of political alternatives in its efforts to save the Weimar democracy. The party was being shut out from governing coalitions by its long-time ally, the Centre Party, and soon, the enduring SPD-Center Party alliance was also to lose its majority in the Prussian parliament, a decisive blow benefiting the anti-republican forces.

The Weimar political crisis combined with a sharpening SPD internal conflict to further handicap the party in its confrontations in the Reichstag, on the streets and at the polls. The SPD's legalist approach to politics engendered a growing immobilism just when the Nazis' and the KPD's street-tactics increasingly dominated the public space. The party's deeply-rooted rationalism prevented it from using 'emotional' issues, such as the yearning for national unity, for wide political mobilization, while its deterministic ideology discouraged radical action for shaping events. At a time when German society demanded change, the SPD appeared conservative and inert. This perception alienated and demoralized large sections of the party's militant constituency. As we have seen, the

Left Opposition was rapidly approaching a showdown with the party's executive that would lead to the 1931 break-up and to the formation of the SAP. The main reason for the split was that, in the Left's view, the SPD politics had moved so much to the centre, that the party was losing its revolutionary character and was being rapidly replaced in many voters' minds as the party of change by the radical NSDAP and the KPD. Having identified itself too much with the liberal and bourgeois-democratic political system that the Weimar state embodied, the Left charged, the SPD was making concessions to anti-democratic forces in order to save this state, even when these compromises were eroding the Social Democratic base and strengthening the reactionary camp. The breakaway of the Left pointed to a growing estrangement between the more dynamic sections of the party's constituency and its increasingly moderate and reformist leadership. However, despite its militancy and willingness to change, the SAP also failed to come up with the positive proposals that could have galvanized and reformed the party.

The reformist path the SPD followed was consistent with its political culture, which represented the values, attitudes and practices of a section of German society that were embodied by the middle-aged, skilled male worker with a long-standing Social Democratic loyalty. The SPD's political propaganda and electoral strategy were primarily designed to answer his needs and speak to this particular worker's social and political experience. An important negative consequence of this orientation was that, in its efforts to mobilize other social strata, the SPD frequently came across as impatient and, sometimes, condescending towards groups supporting the SPD, but which had slightly different needs and views than the skilled, industrial, male worker. Thus, the special demands with which such groups confronted the party were too often dismissed as

originating in "inexperience" (youth), "lack of political interest" (women), "false consciousness" (white-collar workers), "excessive radicalization" (unemployed workers), or "stubborn conservatism" (farmers).

According to its enduring political rationalism, the SPD conceived of modern politics as a sober and, ultimately, transparent debate, that dealt with precisely defined socio-economic issues. In the party's discourse, the male, urban, skilled, industrial worker was the typical practitioner of this kind of politics. Women, youth and peasants did not fit easily into this model; emotions (women), impulses (youth), and irrational attachments to soil and traditions (peasants) could not be unproblematically included in or reconciled with the rational and objective political language of the German Social Democracy. This is an important reason why many members of these groups never felt totally at home in the SPD, nor, like peasants and youth, joined the organization in large numbers.

The rapid transformation of the NSDAP from an upstart party of extreme nationalists and anti-Semites into a people's party by 1929-30, forced the SPD to make adjustments to its policies and propaganda in order to attract and maintain the allegiance of the groups discussed in the paper. In many respects these changes were made too late to be effective. As W. Abendroth put it, by now, the SPD had become an object rather than a shaper of history. For the next fifteen years, the NSDAP was going to be the main architect of German history with catastrophic consequences for the country and much of the world.

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